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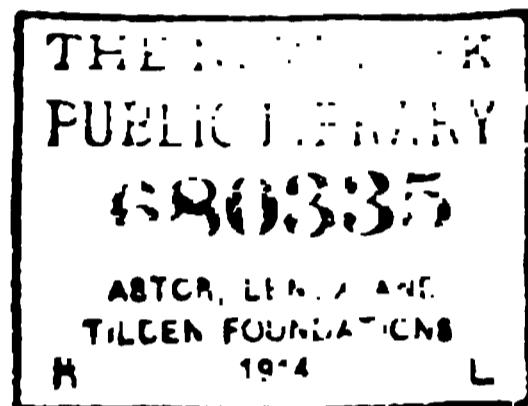
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CHAPTER I

In which the curtain rises slowly on one of those singular occasions, peculiar to New York City's West Side society. — Mrs. Pinchin's Sunday evening at home. — Her guests and her curious poor relation, Miss Maria. — The suave and condescending Mr. Stanton, and his tolerant condescension, entirely intolerable to the other guests. — Exit Mr. Stanton, and enter Philip Geikie. — His interest in Miss Corrie Robinson, Mrs. Pinchin's paid companion. — The face in the doorway and Mrs. Pinchin's alarm.

PROMPTLY at eight o'clock on a Sunday evening in the spring, the drawing-room at Mrs. Pinchin's in West 75th Street began to fill itself with Mrs. Pinchin's guests. They came on foot, as a rule, and it was astonishing how many among them arrived singly — unattached men and unattended women who, for some particular reason, seemed neither to know one another well, or their hostess either, for that matter. But this was always more or less the case with these entertainments. Mrs. Pinchin was an assiduous sociable; and, after all, the manner in which she had drummed her party together, and filled her drawing-room to the walls, reflected no little credit on her activities, her persistence, and her ingenuous social enterprise.

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“So good of you to come,” murmured Mrs. Pinchin to each newcomer, and then after a commonplace or two, a hint about the weather, perhaps, or some other observation equally reassuring, the guest was introduced profusely to all within reach; and there, turned adrift among the others herded in the drawing-room, was required to expect no more from the hostess. Usually this resulted in the person, either male or female, coming to anchor in an attitude eloquently awkward and ill at ease, embarrassed by strangeness, and furtively on the lookout for some familiar face; so that before the music began every chair held its morose castaway, every corner its anchorite. Others, unable to find chairs or a secluded nook, stood around the room in postures of loneliness varied by an occasional guilty survey of their neighbors, or a profound and prolonged study of the pictures on the wall. In time, each picture held its devotee; and then each vase and bronze, like a magnet, began to attract and attach to itself some solitary with a close and anxious regard of its merits. “So good of you to come!” murmured Mrs. Pinchin, greeting a fresh arrival; and thus it continued, exactly in a fashion with all Mrs. Pinchin’s evenings at home.

The hostess was a large, heavy-featured person, a faded woman almost the Jewess in type — loose jowled, dark and solemn, with a pair of eyes of the most singular dullness peering between thick and heavy lids. These and the deep puffs beneath them, her flabby cheeks and the habitual droop of her

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mouth, gave to Mrs. Pinchin, in moments of repose, an aspect of wistfulness — a stolid, almost sullen gravity. It was the look, in fact, that one sees in the visages of large, dignified dogs — the St. Bernard, for instance, or, notably, the mastiff — and in Mrs. Pinchin's face the likeness was accentuated by her drooping jaw and pouched and fallen cheeks. To bear out the resemblance further, when she moved it was with the utmost slowness and deliberation, her weight borne heavily and with a great deal of ponderous effort. A slight difficulty in her gait impeded her, a little limp that was almost a hop; and as she passed among her guests Mrs. Pinchin leaned on a stick that thwacked the floor like a blind man's. Occasionally, however, she discarded this support, and in moving about relied entirely on the arm of her paid companion, Miss Corrie Robinson, a young, plainly dressed girl, who sat in the background until needed. Miss Maria Pinchin, who was understood by Mrs. Pinchin's acquaintances to be some sort of a poor relation, sat there also, equally in the background, but, unlike the companion, rarely required to come forward. No one recalled having ever seen a Mr. Pinchin, but this was overlooked in the inference that Mrs. Pinchin had long been a widow.

Miss Maria resembled Mrs. Pinchin in no other particular than the name. She was small and spare in contrast to her patron's bigness, a wasted blonde with the thin, straw-colored hair that, in place of turning gray with years, grows to a lighter sorrel instead; and dry and harsh, her locks were thinned

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out on the temples and equally meager behind the ears. One perceived at a glance her self-conscious and uneasy manner — an attribute so fluttering and evasive that even to catch a single gleam from her pale, watery eyes was enough to invite in her a perfect convulsion of embarrassment. Thus effaced and forgotten, she sat there silently in the background, more alone than the most lonely of Mrs. Pinchin's latest guests, never by any chance speaking unless spoken to, and then strangling any effort at further conversation by her agitated replies. Few interested themselves, however, in Miss Maria's presence, and the few that came often enough to Mrs. Pinchin's drawing-room to be aware of the figure in the background knew only that she wore Mrs. Pinchin's discarded gowns, and withdrew soon after the entertainment was under way.

To describe Mrs. Pinchin's guests separately would be difficult — particularly difficult were one to consider their variety. Collectively, they appeared to be of the class that infest the drawing-rooms of women who have a purpose to achieve, one usually social, but with little knowledge of how to effect it. If Mrs. Pinchin aimed to enter society, it seemed certain she must have knocked at many doors — and doors innumerable varied, too, for the night's guests were no exception to the general sort that attended her entertainments. In mass, they seemed to bulk somewhat on the ordinary; though singly, one descried three or four individuals in whom there were suggestions not entirely limited to the social or the

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deliberate struggle to obtain it. For instance, there leaned against the mantel-piece in an attitude of the utmost dejection, a Mr. Alfuente, a lean, rumpled person with an oily, dissatisfied face. To use an expression, he was one of the lions of the evening, a usual type of the performer, notable, *poseur*, grubbed up by Mrs. Pinchin to give her evenings a tone. In fact, he was a musician — or so it was proclaimed; but what his abilities were, or what claim he had to genius, few of those present, beside Mr. Alfuente himself, were in the least way possessed of the facts. Close beside him stood a tall, angular woman very much overdressed in a low-cut, yellow gown, a dress draped with rivulets and cascades and waterfalls of lace backed up by a whole nursery of artificial roses, and supplied with a train swathed around her like the drapery of a Galatea. Aside from this, she would have been noticeable for the extreme width of her mouth; for her bony, staring face, and for her rabbit-like teeth, very much in evidence when she smiled. This was Miss Mina Sutro Freedlark, a lady who was known from her own account to have cast before the public many pearls of Sapphic verse, all keyed in the most passionate strain imaginable. It was less generally understood, however, that Miss Freedlark also contributed to a newspaper a column that appeared apart from the recognized social intelligence under the conciliating title of *West Side Society*. Mrs. Pinchin's name stood regularly in this budget, her entertainments invariably described as *functions*, and the hostess as the "well-known

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society leader." The two—the poet-scribbler and the hostess — had met at one of the women's clubs which Mrs. Pinchin occasionally attended as part of her social enterprise; and the acquaintance, thus begun and continued, had signaled Mrs. Pinchin's frequent appearances in print. The advantage, however, was not so one-sided as it may appear, for occasionally, at Mrs. Pinchin's invitation, the poetess had been suffered to regale the guests with selections from her Sapphic verse, all of which were shortly to be published, or, more definitely speaking, when a publisher that would undertake it had been decided on. Singularly enough, it was on this very topic that Miss Freedlark addressed herself so exuberantly to Mr. Alfuente, forestalling every effort at interruption, and, oblivious of his growing dejection, drowning him in a flood of speech.

Others of the same caste stood about. The sallow-faced, pensive man with leonine hair Mrs. Pinchin had introduced as "Mr. Luckison, the painter." He, too, wore the same air of unprosperous discontent. Moping in a further corner was another, a Mr. Alling, who worked in an uptown real-estate office, and was known to have written a play, which a manager was now looking at, and at which other managers previously had looked. In addition, there were— But why go on? Many such persons had passed through the crucible of Mrs. Pinchin's drawing-room — painters, poets, writers, musicians, a tragic actor, and an heroic actress or so, and once even a turbaned Hindu pundit, fat and discreetly

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smug ; men and women of many varied degrees — all imminently on the point of doing something — all artistic, perhaps abnormally so — and all, for some inexplicable reason, never quite making a success of it. One and all, they had been brought there to Mrs. Pinchin's at the first whisper of their genius ; and patiently tried out, either wearying or wearied, had gone their way to return to her drawing-room no more. But what mattered it? — she never showed discouragement. Others were called to fill the vacant places ; others came — all of the same expectant class — all suspected to be eminent — all brought to give her evenings a tone ; so that in the round of Mrs. Pinchin's drawing-room entertainments one almost suspected the deliberate purpose of a *salon*.

Of the ordinary guests less may be said. They provided the crowd, perhaps, without which Mrs. Pinchin would have thought her evening a failure ; and as a mass, they seemed to be made up of the type of woman that belongs to many clubs ; the men of the order that belong to no clubs at all, or, perhaps, a business club where they ate luncheon.

Mrs. Pinchin sat down. She drew the folds of her plum-colored brocade about her, and leaning back negligently in the arms of a heavy and heavily carved chair of black oak, waved imperiously to her paid companion.

“ Play ! ” she commanded tersely.

The young girl thus directed arose and moved

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quietly across the drawing-room. It was a large apartment, richly furnished, though in no particular tone or convention, its fittings indiscriminately echoing at least two or three decades of decoration. For instance, one saw among its flotsam and jetsam the black walnut relics of the '70's rubbing elbows with the extreme, latter-day art of upholsterer and furnisher — very highly varnished pieces of mahogany, maple, cherry, oak, altogether too massive, on one hand; or, on the other, too fragile by far. But richness prevailed dominantly — richness in the hangings, in the upholstery of the furniture. Richness in the profuse ornaments of porcelain, enamel and brass. Richness in the rugs, the wallpaper, the tinted ceiling. Richness even in the varnish of the wainscot. One's eye became almost pained with its layishness. Too much lavishness. Too many pieces, for example, of *cloisonné*, of Sevres, of Royal Worcester. Too many lamps and screens and fixtures of too shiny brass and enamel. Too much onyx on too many table tops. Too much satin upholstering, far, far too fat and cushiony. Too much of everything. Altogether too much!

Miss Robinson, the paid companion, edged her way across the room, steering a difficult passage through the channels between the furniture. In a corner near a window stood the piano, a large, cumbersome grand finished in the natural rosewood. It, too, cried opulence — a fat-legged instrument, obese, pompous, florid, and no more harmonizing with its companion furnishings than it harmonized with the dingy, lam-

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entable dowdiness of the young woman who now sat down to play on it.

She was a slender, delicately-featured girl, shadowy-eyed and repressed. One might have thought her about nineteen or twenty, though her quietness and repose under the trying circumstances of her position would have dignified a much older woman and one of a far better place in life. As was the case with Miss Maria, few of Mrs. Pinchin's random guests ever troubled themselves with her presence; and in saying this, one feels a suspicion that Miss Robinson herself may have contributed to it by her reserve and quiet aloofness. In moments of her deepest repose, a look of real and intense wistfulness sometimes crept into her face — a pensive air altogether unlike Mrs. Pinchin's heavy-eyed, loose-jowled moodiness; and then Miss Robinson seemed to exist far away from the drawing-room, its lavish opulence, and its atmosphere of persistent social effort. Perhaps the reason why this was not more generally remarked in her, was that few appear attractive or show off to advantage who drag back their hair from the temples and wring it into a stiff, ungainly knot like a housemaid's done up for the morning. Still, this dowdiness and lack of personal adornment, though it were even by design, could not conceal the depth and animation of her eyes, once they awoke. They were a dark hazel, fringed by heavy lashes, and of that quietly reflective nature that fasten upon whomever they study, as if weighing every hidden fault and virtue with dispassionate

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judgment. It was just such a glance that she turned toward Mrs. Pinchin and her guests when she sat down to play, nothing contemptuous in it, or in the slightest way superior, but a clear-eyed, girlish look, calm and reflective. Indeed, one might have thought her more detached and lonely in the midst of Mrs. Pinchin's rococo drawing-room than even Miss Maria, or the most lonely of Mrs. Pinchin's guests. Superficially, it was known that the girl had been adopted very early in life, and that she had many reasons to feel grateful to Mrs. Pinchin for what she had done for her. One or two, who had felt emboldened enough to ask about her parentage, had been answered with an expressive shrug of Mrs. Pinchin's shoulders and an embarrassing change in the topic. Her father and mother? Mrs. Pinchin's shrug was, indeed, definite.

"Play!" said the hostess, imperiously waving her hand; and as the girl turned over the music sheets, the hangings parted and admitted another guest.

Here, at least, was one who seemed to have long survived the trial of Mrs. Pinchin's evenings. A few who had met him before knew him incompletely as Mr. Stanton, a tall, well-formed, wiry man of an almost military bearing, who wore the unmistakable, though somewhat careless, evidences of breeding. He still clung to the past fashion of side whiskers, and these and his hawklike face and cool, steady eyes gave to him a confident, distinguished air that was somehow lacking among the other guests, all of whom Mr. Stanton treated with a patient, supercilious toler-

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ance, entirely intolerable to the victims. If he possessed intimates or an occupation, the fact was unknown to Mrs. Pinchin's visitors, who felt only an impartial dislike and awe in his presence. Smiling slightly, and with a careless glance at the young woman seated before the piano, Mr. Stanton walked across the drawing-room and murmured a good evening, a greeting the hostess mutely acknowledged by motioning to a chair at her side.

"Play, I tell you!" she commanded a little sharply, and the companion, averting her eyes, struck into the bars of the *Melodie in F*. At the same moment Miss Maria, her gaze fastened on the newcomer, edged along the wall toward the doorway, and, with a last agitated look around her, slipped away through the hangings for the evening.

There was a perturbed expression on Mrs. Pinchin's face, a little troubled frown that knitted her shaggy brows more closely together than before. It was as if she pondered something fretfully, and that Mr. Stanton's coming had contributed to it. If so, however, Mr. Stanton affected to ignore her mood; for, still smiling, he leaned toward her a moment later, a quizzical expression on his face, though Mrs. Pinchin's frown grew deeper.

"Well, heard anything?" murmured Mr. Stanton, lightly.

Mrs. Pinchin abruptly moved. "Hush!" she remonstrated, darting a quick, warning glance, and as the smile widened on Mr. Stanton's lips, her irritation grew with it. "Look here! Why did you persist

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in coming?" she demanded suddenly, her whisper harsh and reproachful. "I'm not going to do this for you again. You know there's nothing to be gained by it, and ——"

Mr. Stanton smiled a little more broadly, a whimsical, well-managed smile, mocking and careless. "And everything to be lost, do you mean?" he inquired teasingly. "Tut! tut! don't be so uneasy."

Mrs. Pinchin bit her lip, and with her head averted, affected to listen to the music. But what she had in her mind seemed to be of too much importance to leave unsaid, and suddenly she shrugged her shoulders. "You mark my words," she muttered sullenly; "we'll live to be sorry for this! There's nothing but sheer idiocy in your persistence! *There!*" she exclaimed pointedly, as above the notes of the piano the doorbell tinkled sharply. "There!" ejaculated Mrs. Pinchin, gnawing at her lips, and bestowing many anxious glances at the doorway. "Go now! I say it's madness."

"Oh, very well," murmured Mr. Stanton, in a placating tone; "if you feel that way about it."

Arising, he too glanced at the doorway, and then, with a dry smile for Mrs. Pinchin, leisurely threaded his way through the maze of guests and furniture, as little concerned with the presence of one as he was with the other. Thrusting aside the drapery in a distant corner, he threw one last look at the piano, and then disappeared from view.

Directly on the heels of Mr. Stanton's departure entered a young man of, say, twenty-five or twenty-



“Well, heard anything?” murmured Mr. Stanton, lightly.

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six. There was nothing particularly remarkable in his appearance beyond a certain smartness of dress and the way in which he smiled. It was one of those rare smiles capable of lighting up even the homeliest of countenances, and while the young man was hardly to be called homely, on the other hand one could scarcely term him handsome. A full inventory of his looks would include, besides the smile and the air of smartness, the successive items of good teeth, an alert figure, strong, well-shaped hands, brown hair and eyes, and a pair of erect and self-reliant shoulders, — a pretty good description, one might say, of any average, cleanly, self-respecting fellow, tolerably certain of passing in a crowd. He stood by the door until the music ended, his eye, too, fixed on the girl who was playing, and then, without any of the visible embarrassment that marked so many of Mrs. Pinchin's other guests, made his way across the room toward the hostess.

Mrs. Pinchin was prepared against his coming. Detaching her eyes from the curtains through which Mr. Stanton had gone, she turned solemnly. "So good of you to come, Mr. Geikie," she murmured, ready with the set expression; and instantly the faintest of smiles sprang to Mr. Geikie's lips.

"So good of you to have me," he retorted promptly, so readily that Mrs. Pinchin narrowed her heavy eyes at him, as if she suspected Mr. Geikie of poking fun at her with a set echo for her ready-made, habitual greeting. But the young man's smile — whimsical, merry, almost quizzical — had in-

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stantly departed; and Mrs. Pinchin, being unable to detect anything in his manner less than the deference due her as a hostess, resumed her usual dull air of complacency and waved him to a chair at her side.

“Be seated,” she bade him in her thick, mannish voice; and then she looked slowly around the room, her mouth set in its usual solemn droop.

At the piano the companion, with her eyes downcast, intently turned the sheets of music. There was a faint color in her face and her brow was puckered in a little frown. The majority of the guests, their eyes shifting between her and the hostess, waited expectantly for whatever else was on the program; and near the mantel-piece Miss Freedlark still poised herself. The poetess was alone, for at the beginning of the music, Mr. Alfrente had seized his opportunity to escape. Now — and naturally as one of the *cognoscenti*, perhaps — he had gravitated to the piano, and leaning on the edge of it, was slowly twirling his moustache at Mrs. Pinchin’s companion. One would not have said that his velvet eyes stared openly; but the fact remains that the girl might have been embarrassed by such close attention had she taken the pains to look at him. Why the musician had selected so obscure a victim for his blandishments remains untold, however, unless, perhaps, he had been smitten by her pretty eyes, or was nettled by her blissful insensibility to his presence.

Mrs. Pinchin, looking at the young man beside

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her, found him scowling in the direction of the piano. But Mrs. Pinchin, following his look, saw nothing except her companion engrossed in the music, and Mr. Alfuente edging a little nearer. A steady hum of small talk had risen in the drawing-room; the guests had broken their solemn silences at last; and reassured and complacent, Mrs. Pinchin smiled about her almost genially, her momentary air of uneasiness gone, and once more the contented, sufficient hostess.

“ Well, young man,” she exclaimed, with an almost kittenish playfulness; “ it’s taken you a long time to find the way to my Sunday nights. Never mind — I ’ll forgive you. How ’re you getting on? ”

Mr. Geikie detached his eyes from the little comedy in the corner, and looked at his hostess inquiringly. “ I beg your pardon! You mean the houses? ”

Mrs. Pinchin nodded, smiling at him majestically and with encouragement. “ That ’s what! though I suppose I should n’t talk business when you ’re here for a good time. Still,” she observed oracularly, “ nothing like talking shop to a man to keep him interested. Now, is there? ”

Mr. Geikie, who, it appeared, was an architect, assented good naturedly. “ But look out, Mrs. Pinchin,” he warned, with a mock seriousness; “ if you get me started you know what I ’ll say about your houses. You know what I think about the fittings you have selected.”

Mrs. Pinchin’s air of playfulness became even more

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playful. "Oh, you architects!" she laughed jocosely, and tapped him on the sleeve; "you'd like to ruin us all with your notions!" Here she rolled up her eyes, and clucked tragically. "Do you want to make palaces out of laborers' huts? Why if I —"

Mrs. Pinchin broke off abruptly, and darted another quick look around her. For Mr. Geikie, at last catching Miss Robinson's eye, had risen to smile and bow to her eagerly.

"Hey! you know someone here?" exclaimed Mrs. Pinchin, alertly, not seeing her companion's shy little nod of recognition. "Hey! who is it?"

Once more there was the small air of uneasiness in both her tone and manner, a something that betokened almost anxiety. It was a fact, however, that Mrs. Pinchin often showed her stiffness and lack of poise in ways like this.

Mr. Geikie resumed his seat. "I was bowing to Miss Robinson," he answered quietly.

Mrs. Pinchin sank back almost crossly. "Huh! Oh, you mean her?" she mumbled brusquely, her thick lids fluttering as she blinked again toward the piano. "Where did you ever meet my companion, beh?"

The question was asked idly, carelessly enough, though when Mrs. Pinchin had asked it, she darted a quick little glance at him.

Mr. Geikie explained that he had seen Miss Robinson on occasions when he had called on business and had found Mrs. Pinchin out. How many oc-

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casions, however, he did n't say. "Why, day before yesterday, I talked with her nearly an hour. She 's very pretty, is n't she? "

Mrs. Pinchin nodded, but without enthusiasm. Possibly Mr. Geikie had lowered himself in her estimation by wasting time and attention over one of her servitors. Had she known how much he had enjoyed himself, too, she would have felt even less enthusiastic. Across the room Mr. Alfuente still twirled his moustache, and still threw languishing glances at the oblivious victim; and as Mrs. Pinchin made no further effort to continue the conversation, the young architect did his best unaided.

"You 'll laugh when you hear what we talked about," he volunteered.

"Indeed!" murmured Mrs. Pinchin, absently.

"Yes, I 'm sure you will," he laughed; "guess what it was now."

"Oh, I 'm sure I could n't," she muttered uninterestedly.

Mr. Geikie went on blithely even in the face of this discouragement. "Have n't you said the only way to keep a man interested was to talk shop? Can't you guess now? "

Mrs. Pinchin, without taking the trouble to answer, almost irritably shook her head. But if the turn the talk had taken bored her to dumbness, she was presently to awake from her ennui, the conversation turning at that point into a subject which seemed of singular concern to her.

Mr. Geikie gazed at her whimsically. "We talked

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houses — what do you think of that? Or rather, we talked about a particular house — all about a single little red brick dwelling!"

"All about a house?" echoed Mrs. Pinchin. "About houses! What did that girl want to know about it?"

Mr. Geikie's eyes twinkled merrily. "There, I don't wonder you look astonished! Hardly the usual conversation one makes for a young woman, is it? But I was n't altogether to blame. Miss Robinson quizzed me about it first, and it seems really wonderful what a lot of study she must have given to her pet hobby. We got down finally to locating parts of the city by the types of buildings, and that's pretty hard in New York, too, the way we keep on building at haphazard, without any regard for convention or neighboring types. Don't you agree with me?"

"I should n't wonder," mumbled Mrs. Pinchin, staring at him, the corners of her mouth turned down.

"No — to tell the truth, Miss Robinson will have a hard time locating any house in New York merely by description. All our houses are alike only in their absolute lack of distinction."

Again Mrs. Pinchin moved uneasily. "To locate a house?" she repeated, a tone almost of wonder in her voice. "What house did she want to locate? What kind of a house was it?" she demanded, and after that the heavy-lidded eyes blinked as they left his face and traveled toward the young woman at

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the piano. Mrs. Pinchin seemed highly interested in the kind of house her companion sought to locate.

But from Mr. Geikie's answer, it seemed unlikely that Miss Robinson hunted any particular house; rather, it was a type of house. "Just an ordinary brick dwelling, Mrs. Pinchin — one of your usual old-fashioned affairs, you know," he said lightly, quite unconscious of the growing alertness, her rising interest and concern; and Mr. Geikie was already about to change the topic when the comedy at the piano reached its climax.

"Excuse me a moment," said the young man, rising hastily.

Miss Robinson had left her seat, and, still ignoring Mr. Alfuente, was struggling with a large lamp that stood on the music cabinet at her side. The musician, twirling his moustache, made no effort to aid her, and she was trying to lift the lamp to the piano-top when Mr. Geikie reached her. "Let me help you, won't you?" he asked, and then, with no apology to Mr. Alfuente, he took the lamp and set it down on the piano in a place where it effectually obliterated the velvet-eyed gentleman, his moustaches and his dreamy, languishing smiles.

Miss Robinson looked at him gratefully. "Thank you so much," she said quietly; "that's just where I wished it." There was no other meaning than thanks for the civility in her tone, nor did she even cast a glance at the now retreating Mr. Alfuente, who, after a sour, conscious glare, had departed to

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the other side of the room. But none who had watched the little comedy could have had any reason to doubt the real cause of her gratefulness, — no one, unless it were the lean musician, so completely extinguished in his attentions.

The young man still lingered by the piano. "Found your house yet, Miss Robinson?" he inquired gaily.

During his momentary absence from the seat beside Mrs. Pinchin, Miss Freedlark had swooped down on it, and, as a glance assured him she needed no aid in talking to the hostess, he remained where he was.

"What!" he exclaimed, when she shook her head; "haven't you found it? Really? And after all my aid and encouragement?"

Miss Robinson shook her head again, and smiled back at him. "I have about given up all hope," she answered lightly, slowly sorting her music.

"Oh, never say die!" chided the young man, promptly; "while there's life, there's hope."

"That's true," answered the girl, sagely; "and the longer one lives, the wider becomes the prospect of hope."

"Cynic!" he mocked airily, and then soberly composed his face. "Hope's a mighty good thing anyway. It keeps one going when there's nothing else to go on. Oh, yes it does! I often wonder how it would be to feel without hope."

"I wonder!" exclaimed Miss Robinson, her lips parting a little. But in the response the young man detected nothing but an idle assent.

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"No, Miss Robinson," he rattled on lightly; "you must n't give up hope so easily. Let's see: what kind of a house was it?"

The girl fluttered the sheets of music in her hand, the shadowy light in her eyes grown deeper now, and more thoughtful. "A castle in Spain, I think,—a mansion in the skies, perhaps," she answered, but there was a great deal of effort in the whimsical answer.

"A castle in Spain?" he repeated, and then puckered his brows in mock seriousness. "Now see here, Miss Robinson. I've been thinking about that house of yours. It was a double brick house — was n't that it? — and it had white columns at the door, a fan light, a spindle railing out in front, and green blinds? Yes — you see my wonderful memory!" The girl smiled and nodded. "Very well, then," he cut in buoyantly, a twinkle in his eyes; "I know where you can march right up to a house like that. I do now!" he insisted, when she shook her head in doubt.

"Where?" she asked, oblivious of Mrs. Pinchin who was biting her lip, and vainly and irritably trying to catch her attention.

"Old Greenwich Village!" he answered promptly, and with conviction; "if there's one house down there like it, there are hundreds." But there the girl broke into a ripple of amusement.

"Hundreds!" she gibed; "and I'm looking for only one."

He had to laugh, too, when he thought of it.

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“ Still,” he ventured hopefully, “ your house might be among them; and after the way you’ve hunted for two years, as you tell me, it might be worth trying. Are you going on a still hunt again to-morrow? — and in the morning, as usual? ” She nodded, and he went on with a newer, livelier twinkle in his eye. “ Very well! Then it might pay if you took a look in at Hedge Street. There’s a house like yours in that street, too.”

The girl laughed again and thanked him.

“ But mind! ” he added, “ I don’t think you’ll really ever find it unless you keep your promise to let me go with you. You know what you promised the other day? ”

“ Yes, I remember,” she answered, with a laugh, coloring faintly again.

“ Mind now! You’ll have hard work without me. It’s a pretty large order to find any house by description, just as I’ve been telling Mrs. Pinchin. You see — ”

A low, startled exclamation interrupted him. “ *Mrs. Pinchin!* ” she repeated sharply. “ I hope you have n’t told her what we talked about? ”

There was in her tone and expression something so regretful and startled that the young man stared at her in bewilderment.

“ Why, I did — yes. I hope I have n’t done anything clumsy, have I? Why — ”

The girl turned her head nervously, and shot a swift glance toward her patron. It was a furtive look, a glance as uneasy as that which Mrs. Pinchin

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had thrown toward the piano when Mr. Geikie repeated her companion's talk about a house and houses. There was wakefulness and concern in the girl's face. Beside the hostess Miss Freedlark was still chattering away, her mouth spread in the widest of smiles, and emphasizing her talk with many eloquent shrugs of her lean, scraggy shoulders, many curvings and perkings of her weedy, giraffe-like neck. But Mrs. Pinchin, so far from appearing to listen to her, now had her eyes fixed on the hangings of the door through which Mr. Stanton had so lately made his exit. Someone was peering through the parted curtains, and, whoever the person was, Mrs. Pinchin was watching him with every manifestation of alarm.

"Listen!" warned the girl, swiftly; "please forget that I spoke to you about the house. I cannot tell you what it means to me to say no more about it." She looked again at Mrs. Pinchin, her troubled eyes still brimming with concern. "You may have done no harm, yet ——"

She broke off abruptly, another startled exclamation falling from her lips, and then mute and astounded, she stared toward the back of the room.

There between the hangings appeared for a moment the face of Mr. Stanton. He was gazing toward the two at the piano, and Mrs. Pinchin, from her chair, was violently signaling to him, her heavy features convulsed into a look of warning and dismay, utterly unaware of the figure she was cutting, or of the fact that Miss Freedlark sat open-mouthed and

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dumb, staring at the pantomime. But almost instantly, as the young man at the piano started to look around, Mr. Stanton's face withdrew; and the hostess, falling back into her seat, glared abruptly toward her companion.

“Play!” she rumbled in a thickened voice, her nostrils distended like those of a warhorse answering the alarm. “PLAY!” cried Mrs. Pinchin in a thundering voice; and the young girl, her lip trembling and the color flooding into her face, bent over the piano, her fingers stumbling among the keys.

CHAPTER II

Dealing with the unenviable position of a paid companion. — Corrie Who? and Corrie What? — The case of the Missing Dwelling. — Mrs. Pinchin's flight by night from her former home. — All about the boy with the bread and jam, and Brown, Smith, and Robinson. — "R. tollabee, his Book." — The stricken child, and Miss Maria's curious emotion. — Mrs. Pinchin's rage and alarm. — Finishing with a slight mention of some of the disadvantages of being adopted.

LATE that night and long after the last guest had departed from Mrs. Pinchin's, Corrie Robinson sat up in bed with her hands pressed to her throbbing temples, and stared wakefully through the dark.

"Corrie! Corrie! Corrie!" shrilled a fantastic, jeering voice drumming in her brain. "Corrie! Corrie!" — and afterwards, in an accusing trumpet blast — "Corrie" — contemptuously — "Corrie Who?"

Corrie didn't know. All her mind could bear upon was that she was nineteen now, and Mrs. Pinchin's paid companion. It seemed enough. But Corrie — why could n't Corrie know? It was because she could n't that Corrie sat up in bed in the dark and knuckled her head so distractedly. Oh, if she could only think! Between her throbbing temples the voice, the mocker, thumped away in aching

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sledge strokes, the way it always made her head ache when it came to taunt her, pleading, teasing, everything by turns. Corrie! Oh, Corrie! But, Corrie Who?

It was so she had wrestled with it for years, little variation in her trouble's questioning theme. At twelve, on top of wondering *who*, Corrie had begun to wonder *what* as well. Age brews wisdom, and at twelve Corrie was already old. No, she had never been young, she told herself — never known a time when the inner voice had not cried its mockery in the dark. Times when it screamed pleadings, urging — "Oh, can't you ever remember?" — Corrie used to reach out her arms, as if to grapple with the wraithlike memories that teased her so, — fragments as shadowy as the ghosts of half-forgotten dreams. But she could not draw them to her. "Come back! Oh, won't you please, please come back!" Perhaps after all they were really only dreams — nothing more than that — foggy, nebulous, chimeric. There were fragments that lived hazily — memories of a time and of a place and of people all so different from these she knew now — graphically different because there were no ugly looks, and harsh words, and equally bitter indifference in their scheme of dealing with a little child. Still, that, too, may have been but a dream.

As obscure, vague, indefinite, was her first memory of Mrs. Pinchin — that, as well, little better than an almost forgotten fancy; yet more vivid when she recalled that the moment marked a finite end to her childhood. She thought, or so it seemed, though, of

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course, she must always have lived with Mrs. Pinchin — she thought she played beneath a flowery bush in an old, tangled garden, and that the leathery face stared suddenly down at her — a dream, no doubt — an uneasy, troubling dream this time. “*You, there!*” grunted Mrs. Pinchin, and crooked her finger. Then her thick, flabby lips parted with a gleam of teeth. “*You, there!*” she croaked. Afterward came a confused, bewildering memory of getting up and going with Mrs. Pinchin — to the shifting of that first-time and place to another scene — to this life she had learned to know, certain only of its narrow reality. There was no dream about that — about this. But beyond it, forgetfulness, like a fog, rolled in and hid everything from view. When she awoke she came to herself only as Corrie, and nothing but that — Corrie, the same scrubby, stilt-legged young one who knew only Mrs. Pinchin’s — a wise, solitary child allowed to play with only the servants, and only when they’d let her. No one told her anything of childhood. She knew she’d never been a child — never, never known a childhood. No one had ever taught her anything of that — told her anything childlike — not even that there were toys; or much less, that they were bought for children. And Mrs. Pinchin? you’ll inquire. Oh, Mrs. Pinchin was busy! Mrs. Pinchin must not be bothered! Little girls should be seen and not heard! Little girls must not speak until spoken to — and all that sort of thing.

It was Miss Maria who taught Corrie to read,

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since she had never been sent to school. There were times when Miss Maria used to peer intently at Corrie and then furtively at Mrs. Pinchin; and sometimes Miss Maria seemed trying to be kind. It was she, for instance, who at last unconsciously opened to Corrie's view one peopled world of childhood, the world of dreams;— fairies and fairy godmothers, princesses and wonderful princes, of pumpkins that turned into splendid coaches, and white mice transformed to champing steeds,— all of that and all the rest of the images and fancies that flock the magic land of Make Believe. Once Corrie knew how to read, all this greater world opened to her; and she read, as the true reader reads, rapaciously and without rhyme or reason, gorging herself on whatever books she could find, and asking none to guide her.

It was through this — by instinct, intuition, whatever you wish to call it — that Corrie was led to the box of books hidden in Mrs. Pinchin's garret. That was when she was seven or eight. Almost all the books were in French, and Corrie knew no French. But among them was one book she could understand — a book filled with magic tales of palaces and caves and fairy islands where lived genii and ogres and djins, and more princes and princesses — and poring through their adventures, the child shivered with creepy, crawly feelings up and down her spine, or shook with delicious pleasure. They taught her, too, to build her own magic palaces of delight,— a most wonderful work! And on the fly leaf was written in a boy's scrawling hand:

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“ When this you see,
Remember me.

R. tollabee his Book.”

She hid it away, its existence craftily concealed from Mrs. Pinchin. Greedy Mrs. Pinchin! — maybe she 'd take it for herself. Corrie dared not show it even to Miss Maria, for Corrie had grown wise.

Also in the box was another book; a fat, leather-bound volume fitted with a brass clasp and filled with pictures of people of a bygone day. One face — the first in the album — she decided must be a portrait of Mrs. Pinchin's youth, though the face was less gross and flabby than the face she knew now. Then came the picture of a tall, slender man in black; a solemn, gentle-faced man, who singularly enough held a very small child in his arms. With a child's profound interest in children, her attention was fixed permanently on this; and beside it, there grew into her living mind the face of another figure in the album, one that appeared again and again, the face of a young, dark-eyed woman, the softness of whose clear eyes and quiet smile still shone unobscured from the faded, yellowing prints. Who was she? A fairy godmother? Corrie thought so; and this album and the other book were her dearest possessions, almost her only possessions, hidden away there in Mrs. Pinchin's dusty garret, like treasure trove in a cave.

But to go back. If Corrie were really only Corrie, and Mrs. Pinchin merely Mrs. Pinchin, there was a

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great deal still to be explained. Why, for instance, was Corrie never sent to school — never, never allowed to play with the other children? What was it that was wrong about her? There was the boy who had tried to talk to her through the fence, and now *why?* But wait!

They lived then in the other house — the house with the white columns at the door, the green blinds, the fan light, and so on — not the one in which Mrs. Pinchin was now settled so comfortably, so much after her own taste. Curious Mrs. Pinchin! It seemed to Corrie that Mrs. Pinchin, too, must never have known a childhood — that she'd always been big, past middle-age, and dark, her face tanned like leather. "Little girls must n't bother!" No, indeed! For it appeared Mrs. Pinchin must be extremely careful about her comfort, as she certainly was. She lived perpetually in fear of something happening, it seemed — nervously in dread of it. Mrs. Pinchin called it a *stroke*, whatever that might be; and somehow the presence and bother of little girls contributed largely to her fears. Perhaps that was the reason why Mrs. Pinchin must always have everything first; and nearly always, as it turned out, all there was of it, particularly if it were very good and toothsome. Greedy Mrs. Pinchin! When she was comfortable and cosy and had everything she wished, Mrs. Pinchin grunted thickly, smacking her lips and chuckling softly and grinning to herself. And when she had n't what she wished, one always knew it. Rows and rows of silk and satin gowns hung in her closets,

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and when she had nothing else to do, she 'd go and look them over and feel their fineness between her fingers and stand back and admire them ; and on her tables were always candies and cake and other comforts, and there were flowers and perfumes, too, all of which Mrs. Pinchin liked so much. Only little girls must n't touch, and when little girls could n't help but touch, they almost always got their knuckles rapped. Afterwards Mrs. Pinchin would take a sniff, or a nibble, or a bite, and purr contentedly through her nose.

Corrie, even as a child, realized the grim nature of that massive, self-indulgent woman, and she feared her. There was the cane — the stick that thwacked the floor like a blind man's. Corrie had reason to remember it. There was its rubber ferrule, and the rubber ferrule had more purposes than one. There was the cane's ivory handle shaped like a Greek *tau*, one arm of the crossbar turned over into a hook, which also had its other purposes than a handle. If Mrs. Pinchin had a desire to go softly, the ferrule muffled the thump! thump! along the hallways ; and there were times — in the dark, for instance — when the ivory hook reached out unexpectedly, and seized like a claw !

That time Corrie had talked through the fence to the boy the cane had come hopping soundlessly down the walk and crooked itself on Corrie's arm. Ooh ! how she 'd jumped, scared, and only five ! But why a snub-nosed boy with blue eyes and brown, wavy hair, and armed only with a slice of bread and jam,

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should so excite the emotion of Mrs. Pinchin, Corrie even now could n't imagine. Not even the bread and jam added anything to solve the riddle.

"Mus' n't talk to you," Corrie had mumbled indecisively to the boy; for orders were orders, particularly when Mrs. Pinchin had given them. But the bread and jam had been held near enough to bite, so Corrie had bitten recklessly. Ever afterwards jam possessed for her a precious significance that never seemed to fade, particularly damson jam. "Must n't!" warned Corrie, her mouth full; "'t ain't allowed to speak to boys."

"Go on!" gibed the boy, grinning widely. "Nobody's looking."

"They are too! Things is always watching," corrected Corrie, who knew. For had not Mrs. Pinchin always warned her that *something* would catch her if she did n't watch out. *Things was everywhere*, as Mrs. Pinchin had definitely explained, and no wicked child could escape them. Nor from Mrs. Pinchin, as it appeared.

"We've just moved in; and say, I know about you!" declared the boy, importantly; "you live in Pinchin's, and father, he says your father —"

Corrie had n't learned what the boy's father had said; for just then the ivory handle crooked about her arm, and she was dragged backward with a jerk.

"Did n't I tell you?" menaced Mrs. Pinchin under her breath. At one glimpse of the warfare in her face the boy had taken to his heels terrified. "Did n't I tell you?" She hopped back up the walk,

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one hand gripping Corrie under the arm; and in the dark, top-floor room where Corrie was always locked, Mrs. Pinchin flopped down on a chair, one fluttering hand over her heart and her flabby lips twitching convulsively. There she sat, perhaps on the verge of one of her promised strokes, gagging and panting and working her face and wheezing 'twixt her teeth in distress. But just as Corrie was prepared to see what a stroke was really like, Mrs. Pinchin drew a heavy breath and sat up.

"That was close — very, very close!" she whispered to herself. "I must take care — yes, I shall have another unless I'm very, very careful! — *You come here!*"

Corrie went because the ivory handle had reached out for her; and Mrs. Pinchin's face drew close.

"Look me in the eyes now! No stories, mind you! Here! Look at me! What was that boy saying to you?"

Corrie's eyes tried hard to dodge the eyes so close to hers. "He said his mother gave him the bread and jam. He wanted to know if mine does."

Mrs. Pinchin gave her a little shake. "Come — none of that! What else did he tell you? Look me in the eyes, I say!"

Corrie breathed between her clenched teeth. "He did n't say anything else; you came and took me away." She put both her hands against Mrs. Pinchin's breast and pushed. "Let me go! I hate you, Mrs. Pinchin!" she whispered. "You 're not my mother at all!"

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Mrs. Pinchin smiled, though she did n't let go; and her double rows of shiny teeth grinned in Corrie's face. Presently she moved slightly, and gripped Corrie between her knees. "Listen — look me in the eyes! Are you looking me in the eyes?"

She detached one hooked hand from Corrie's arm, and with a big, bony knuckle knocked Corrie softly on the forehead. Tap! tap! — like that. "I want you to remember this." Rap! "I'll not stand any nonsense from you. No snooping now!" Rap! She gripped Corrie tighter. "Now about your mother" — Rap! tap! — "and your father!" A double rap! tap! like a bailiff banging on a door. "The less you talk about them, the better for you. Got that in your head?" Rap! tap! tap! "Particularly your father!" Another bailiff's knock. "You understand?"

Corrie answered "yes 'm," just as she had always been taught to say to Mrs. Pinchin; though she did n't understand.

"I took you," rapped Mrs. Pinchin, knuckle-wise, "and gave you a good home. You 're nobody. You 're called Pinchin because I let you. Remember that now, if anyone asks you." Rap! tap! "I gave you a home and a name only because I 'm good and kind. Don't forget!"

"No, ma'am," sincerely.

"One moment! You will be allowed to live here as long as you are good. But mind you — *no snooping!* You 're expected to be grateful, too. Now stay in here until I let you out."

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No *snooping*, mind you! Many things testified to Mrs. Pinchin's aversion to such an ungrateful, ill-mannered, crafty, deceitful return for all her kindness. No one must snoop while Mrs. Pinchin was around — and very few dared, either. For Mrs. Pinchin was constantly stealing up one dark hall and prowling down another and climbing the stairs on tip-toe, the thump! thump! of her cane muffled, and carrying her along as silently and craftily as a black, bulky shadow following at one's heels. No one could snoop while Mrs. Pinchin was about and hope to escape the consequences, because Mrs. Pinchin always caught them at it. And even if they really were n't snooping when she caught them, it amounted to the same thing, anyway, since she always accused them furiously. A long line of departing upstairs girls, waitresses, parlor maids, and even cooks, and occasionally, later on, a coachman or so, testified to the fact of her aversion for it; and at the first sign she 'd fall into a towering rage and promptly bundle the offenders off about their business. Corrie was often accused, just as she was when she talked to the boy through the fence; though somehow she was n't turned out of doors for it. But when Mrs. Pinchin detected anyone in the act of snooping, it seemed to upset her beyond all expression; and after her rage had burned out she 'd sit and shiver and roll her eyes about and peek into the dark corners behind the doors; and afterwards Mrs. Pinchin had to be stayed with a cup of strong tea or a sip of sherry or port. Then she 'd lean back and sup the tea or sip the

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sherry, making a small, guzzling sound in her throat, and smacking her lips, and tasting every drop enjoyably. But it nearly always required a day or so after anyone had snooped to bring Mrs. Pinchin back to her usual complacency and self-satisfaction.

“I’ll teach you to snoop! Now stay in here till I let you out!”

Mrs. Pinchin was turning the key in the door when Corrie heard Miss Maria crying in agitation on the stair. “Oh! Oh!” cried Miss Maria, breathlessly. “The house back there — The people that ‘ve moved in — ”

Mrs. Pinchin’s thick voice cut in sharply. “Hold your tongue! If I had n’t found that out myself already, where would we be now?”

There was a low murmur of talk on the landing after that, and a further sound, as if Miss Maria’s emotions had overflowed in a little trickling whimper of distress. Then Mrs. Pinchin’s voice raised itself again.

“Have n’t I told you to stop gadding down there all the time? Oh, I believe you ’ll be the death of me yet!”

Corrie, crouched against the panel, had wondered what relation *gadding* bore to *snooping*. Also, where was it that Miss Maria gadded to?

The child leaned back from the door after the voices droned away on the stairs, and decided gravely that, as soon as she got out, she ’d ask the boy what it was his father knew about hers. Because she had n’t known before she ’d ever had a father. Of course,

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Mrs. Pinchin had warned her the less she said about fathers and mothers the better it would be for her. But Corrie did n't care. And the boy — well, Corrie never got the chance to ask him. For during two days she was locked in her room, and while she sat there she heard feet stamping on the floors below and the sound of things thumping on the stairways; and on the night of the second day, when she was brought down, not a stick of furniture was left in the house, and the three servants had been sent away.

They went out into the night, then, Mrs. Pinchin and Miss Maria and Corrie, and getting into a carriage, drove endlessly. Afterwards the carriage was dismissed, Mrs. Pinchin shaking Corrie awake, and dragging her aboard a street car; and then they rode still further, Corrie going to sleep again and falling up against Miss Maria every time the car bounced. Later they got out and drove in another carriage, a chance night-hawk picked up at the curb; and when the child awoke again, it was morning, and she found herself in the house where Mrs. Pinchin had now been settled so long. There Corrie's life began anew.

Nothing happened for a long time. At seven she found the books, and it was a great episode. The album she stowed secretly behind the lowest drawer of a big, old-fashioned walnut bureau; the book of fairy tales she shoved under a pile of rugs in the corner. Whenever Mrs. Pinchin was out and Miss Maria was n't watching, she used to steal into the garret and get the books; and many a night when

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the child should have been asleep, she sat up studying the big print, or poring over the pictures. Then one day Mrs. Pinchin and her maids descended suddenly on the garret storeroom, and overhauled it from end to end. That is, the maids did, Mrs. Pinchin contenting herself with one discreet peep, after which she retired, elegantly dusting her finger tips.

Corrie never saw her book again. The album, hidden behind the bureau drawer, was saved, but the other was gone eternally. For days and days she kept up the desperate hunt, and, emboldened at last by woe, she knocked at Miss Maria's door.

Miss Maria was sitting by the window, a child's garment in her hands, and her eyes, for once, quietly at rest and softened.

“Well, Corrie?”

Corrie gazed at her fixedly. “I want my book,” she murmured pleadingly; “won’t you please get me back my book?”

“What book, child?”

“My book that’s gone. Did she take it?”

The *she*, of course, meant only Mrs. Pinchin. Who else would have robbed her of her small possession?

But Miss Maria knew nothing about it, and she showed clearly that she didn’t. “I have n’t seen your book, Corrie. Child, why do you look so troubled?”

Corrie shook her head. She felt too dispirited to talk about it when she found it would be of no use. Of course Mrs. Pinchin had the book — the greedy

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old thing! — and wouldn't give it up. Corrie dropped down on a stool near Miss Maria, and, with her chin in her hands, sat watching her at her sewing.

“What's that?” she asked dully, pointing at Miss Maria's work. For awhile there was no answer; Miss Maria, after a quick look at the child, bending lower over the sewing. Then, at length, she answered.

“It's for a little girl,” she answered quietly; “a poor little girl I know.”

A poor little girl! Corrie, still mourning her lost treasure, wondered idly what kind of a poor little girl a poor little girl must be. “She mus' n't have any mother, now?” she suggested carelessly; “has she?”

Miss Maria cast a startled look at Corrie, and catching her eye, bent back to her sewing.

“Maybe I could play with her,” added Corrie, reflectively; “could n't I ever play with a little girl, sometime?”

Miss Maria laid her sewing in her lap, and sat absorbed and silent, thinking deeply, and staring straight before her.

“I guess I'd like to play with some little girl,” said Corrie, as if musing aloud. “Don't little girls like to play with me?”

A dry gulp almost like a sob sounded deep in Miss Maria's throat, and she looked at Corrie with her mouth quivering. “Yes, yes! They would like to play with you! Oh, Corrie! Corrie! — and you've never had anyone to play with either!” Miss

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Maria drew a hand across her eyes, and turning away, picked up her sewing.

But that was not the end to it. A day or two later, just after the street door had closed on Mrs. Pinchin's departure, Corrie heard a quick step on the stair. It was Miss Maria, hurrying, and in her face was both eagerness and cunning. "Come!" she whispered shrilly, and, clumsy-handed in her haste, helped Corrie put on her hat and jacket. "Come!" she urged; "we must hurry before she gets back!"

They rode in a street car for many blocks, and when they alighted, Miss Maria, holding Corrie by the hand, darted up one street and down the other, turning corners hurriedly and darting over the crossings and going altogether like one possessed. They came at last to a quaint, ugly bystreet, and there in the middle of the block stood a plain-faced, square, well-kept little brick house, with a big, shining knocker on the door and a little garden in front about as large as a tea-tray, all filled with bachelor's buttons, marigolds, geraniums, mignonette, heliotrope, and old-fashioned roses. Two ragged small boys were hanging over the fence with obvious designs on the blossoms; but when Miss Maria came hustling up to the gate they looked at her face once and went scuttling away up the street.

Miss Maria did n't rap with the knocker; she let herself in with a key. Perhaps this was where Miss Maria always went gadding. At any event, she turned around in the hallway, and, looking at

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Corrie, made a strong effort to control herself. "There's a little girl here — I've brought you to play with her. You can play if you want to — you can play — you can play with the little girl. I'll let you!"

A door opened on the upper floor, flooding the hallway with light. Standing there was a woman in a white apron and cap — some kind of an attendant, Corrie realized, thinking of it afterwards. "Oh!" said the woman smiling, "is it you, Miss —"

"Will you come down here, please," cried Miss Maria, pushing Corrie into the room beside the hall.

"Certainly, Miss —"

"I'm in a great hurry," added Miss Maria, interrupting her. She closed the door on Corrie, but the child could still hear the voices in the hall. However, Miss Maria only wished a cup of tea and some toast, and she would be greatly obliged to the young woman if she would go downstairs and make it herself.

"Oh, why yes, indeed, Miss —"

"And I'll be right down for it," said Miss Maria, hastily. "Call out to me when it's ready."

Then Miss Maria opened the door and took Corrie up the stairs to a room at the front of the house.

But Corrie never played with the little girl sitting there in that room. Nor could she ever forget why she could not play with her. For the child, moving, turned up to them two blank and expressionless eyes — eyes in which there was no light of reason, light that is the soul of the living, knowing mind.

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Corrie stared bewilderedly, aware only in her own childishness that this was no child like other children she had seen. As she stood there nonplussed, she felt Miss Maria's fingers tighten on hers, and again Miss Maria stared fixedly at Corrie. "You can play with her — I'll let you. Aren't you going to play with the little girl I've brought you to see? Now you've got someone to play with — let me see you play with her — just once, Corrie. Let me see you play like other children!"

But though Corrie tried, striving to touch some answering chord in that poor, dulled, feeble little mind, they had to come away at last defeated. Corrie had found no playmate. "Oh Corrie! Corrie!" murmured Miss Maria, and wept.

But who was this child? That was the question. Dumbly Miss Maria led Corrie down the stairs again, and without waiting for her tea and toast, which she seemed to have forgotten utterly, she let herself and Corrie out at the street door, and turned on her way homeward.

"I don't think that little girl could know how to play," suggested Corrie in a troubled voice. But Miss Maria made no answer, and still in silence, Corrie trudging solemnly at her side, they returned to Mrs. Pinchin's.

It was Mrs. Pinchin herself that met them at the door, the very thing that Miss Maria had seemed so anxious to avoid. She glared first in astonishment at Miss Maria, who would have slipped by her in the hall, and then she glared at Corrie. "Where have

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you two been?" she demanded meaningfully. "Where have you been taking that child?"

The old, shifty-eyed, frightened look of uneasiness sprang back into Miss Maria's face, though she answered in sullen defiance. "I took her where I've been," she said; and then with a little shake she faced Mrs. Pinchin truculently. "Why should n't I?"

Mrs. Pinchin shot her an angry scowl. "Do you mean ——" she began furiously, and then checked herself. "Go to your room!" she ordered Corrie; and catching the gleam in Mrs. Pinchin's eyes, Corrie wasted no time in going.

Miss Maria never took her back to the plain-faced brick house, and to the child sitting in the upper room staring at the light. Days afterward, when Corrie spoke of it, Miss Maria silenced her with a fierce *hush!*

But this strange episode meant nothing strange to a child whose life had been made up of just such queer occurrences. It lived in her memory only because it was linked with another more important happening.

"Mrs. Pinchin," said Corrie, becoming bold, "what did you do with my book? I want it!"

"You *want* — you *want* what?" This with a rising inflection, a note of astonishment, perhaps derision, that Corrie should want anything, and, much less, should audaciously demand it. "What book? and what do you mean by coming in here without knocking?"

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"I want my book," repeated Corrie, obstinately. "I want my Tollabee book!"

"*What!*!" There was no longer any derision in Mrs. Pinchin's voice. It still betrayed astonishment, no doubt, yet with that was a more potent emotion. The leathery hue crept out of Mrs. Pinchin's face, and a pasty, unwholesome pallor crept into it. "*What!*!" she whispered.

"My Tollabee book," insisted Corrie. "'T ain't yours, Mrs. Pinchin, it's mine!"

The paroxysm that swept over Mrs. Pinchin's face again flew the signals of an impending stroke. But again Mrs. Pinchin recovered herself. "You say that again!" she commanded in a thrilling whisper, and with a spiderlike dart reached out and clutched Corrie with her stick. Just then Miss Maria appeared at the door, and, seeing what was going on, tried to retreat unnoticed. But Mrs. Pinchin saw her, and flew up in a passion. "You numskull!" she cried, beneath her breath. "You see what you've — Oh, clear out of here! I shall lose my temper next."

There were times when Corrie wished she would, and that she might never find it again. But to her astonishment, when she looked back from the door, Mrs. Pinchin's face was quite composed, though her eyes still glittered a little.

She looked at Corrie, and slowly shook her head, her manner sadly reproachful. "Little girls mus' n't come in without knocking," she said, clucking her tongue. "How many times must I tell you that?"

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Corrie hung her head without answering; endlessly, she thought.

"I shall be real vexed if you do it again," remonstrated Mrs. Pinchin; "that's why I nearly got angry just now. Have n't you been told you mus' n't bother?"

"Yes 'm," answered Corrie, truthfully.

"And —" Mrs. Pinchin was about to say something more in the same key when she looked down and saw Corrie was standing on the hem of her lace-trimmed wrapper. "Here! take your dirty shoes off my skirt!" She gave Corrie another little shake and shoved her away, delicately shaking out her ruffles to assure herself no damage had been done. Afterwards she leaned over to the table and helped herself to a sweet — a stuffed prune it chanced to be, taken from a wooden box lined with tinfoil. These were an especial dainty of Mrs. Pinchin's, and somehow in the child's mind they were always associated with her in their dark, oily fatness. "I'm afraid," Mrs. Pinchin mumbled, her mouth full, "that you're inclined to be a very naughty little girl;" slowly eating while she spoke, smacking her lips and breathing thickly. "You've been told you mus' n't bother me; but you come bouncing in here and waking me out of my nap, and all because of what? A book!" said Mrs. Pinchin, disgustedly, "nothing but a book!"

She helped herself to another fat, oily prune, and regarded it enjoyingly before biting into it. "Umh!" said Mrs. Pinchin, filling her mouth;

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“what should I know about it? — about your old book now?” she added carelessly, licking her finger tips. Then her eyes whipped around suddenly. “What was the name you said now? Connolly? Jellaby? Who gave you that book? *Answer me!*”

“I found it in a box up in the garret. No one wanted it but you, Mrs. Pinchin. Did you take it?”

“In a box? In the garret? Oh!” exclaimed Mrs. Pinchin, swiftly. “Is *that* all? Then you get out of here! Do you hear me? Hunh! and don’t you let me catch you snooping around my garret again. Clear out, I say!”

So the book was gone! gone for good! never found again! Far back in the girl’s mind lived the memory of it, and all the other memories — the vague and the vivid — and still they came to haunt her; Corrie growing through girlhood, — twelve, fourteen, older all the time, far older than her years intended her to be.

At sixteen she went to Mrs. Pinchin, quietly, appealing, yet not to be put off any longer. “Mrs. Pinchin, I want to know who I am. Who am I, Mrs. Pinchin? Won’t you even tell me my name?”

Mrs. Pinchin’s heavy features screwed themselves into a sudden, menacing frown. “What’s that? What do you mean?”

Corrie fixed her eyes on the woman’s and held them there. “I want to know who I am, I say. What is my name, Mrs. Pinchin?”

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Mrs. Pinchin's head rolled from side to side, and her thick, drooping lips drooped a little further at the corners. "Your name, hey? What have I got to do with your name? Ain't Pinchin good enough? Or would you rather have Brown, Smith, or ——" She checked herself, and leered through her thick, leathery eyelids. "Your name, hey? Well, I'll tell you what it is. I guess I can tell you that much. It's Robinson! yes, that's it. They said it was that, anyway, and I don't know what became of them. How's Robinson suit you now? — any better than Pinchin? Robinson! Robinson!"

She chuckled noisily, and Corrie stood and watched her.

"You adopted me from them? Why did you adopt me, Mrs. Pinchin?"

Another startled look, another gleam from beneath the dark, leathery lids. "Why? — well, why should n't I? I did because I wanted to, that's why! Miss Robinson! Now go out of my room. I have n't any time to waste on you. I'm going to take my nap!"

Miss Robinson! Corrie did n't believe her. But Robinson — Brown or Smith or Robinson would do in the meanwhile. Anything but Pinchin! So Robinson she called herself and was called, the same kind of christening that would have been given to a waif picked up in a hedgerow.

In the girl's mind there lived the feeling that when she found the snub-nosed boy with the bread and

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jam, the boy with the brown, wavy hair, she would find a real name — not Robinson, but the name that was really hers.

What was it, anyway, he had tried to tell her when Mrs. Pinchin dragged her away?

CHAPTER III

Showing how even so well-regulated a character as Mrs. Pinchin's may seek variety by omitting to breakfast in bed. — Her esteem of food. — Miss Maria's rebellion and the result. — Mrs. Pinchin's private den. — Miss Maria turns on the waterworks, her usual relaxation. — Mrs. Pinchin's unusual private equipage, her two antiquated roans and mulatto coachman. — The coachman's justified astonishment when his mistress abandons her brougham on the outskirts of Greenwich Village.

ON the morning after Mrs. Pinchin's characteristic Sunday entertainment the bell in her bedroom rang suddenly, imperatively, — not to say violently. As it was still early, unusually early for Mrs. Pinchin to stir herself, the summons was wholly unexpected; a sufficient reason why no one was near to answer it on the jump, and, in turn with that, a most sufficient reason why its clamor grew so vigorously.

Ordinarily Mrs. Pinchin breakfasted in bed, seldom awakening before ten o'clock, and very infrequently arising before noon. Promptly at ten a maid was expected at the door with her tray, and on this tray Mrs. Pinchin found fruit, a cereal, coffee and cream, eggs, a chop or a bit of fish, and, to finish off with, a generous supply of either waffles or pancakes. Slipping her arms into a dressing sack, Mrs. Pinchin sat up in bed with the tray on her knees, and in acknowledged comfort and with many audible evidences of

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enjoyment, proceeded to make away with all before her. Afterwards she dawdled over the morning newspapers, her first interest in the social budget; and then when she had learned what the gay world had done and was doing, Mrs. Pinchin leisurely arose.

But to-day Mrs. Pinchin had other plans in view, a break in her routine, as the growing clamor of her bell assured. Corrie, coming down the stairs, was the first to hear it, and, with a little wrinkling of her brow, she stopped and rapped at the door.

Bolstered among the pillows, Mrs. Pinchin sat up in bed, obviously alive to a very righteous indignation. "Is anyone awake in this 'house?'" she demanded tartly, "or are all you lazy creatures still snoring? Pity I can't ever get anyone to answer me when I ring!"

It was a wide, high, half-canopy bed in which Mrs. Pinchin lay, a massive piece of furniture veneered with varnished bird's-eye maple of a canary-yellow hue. Yet, in its massiveness, its occupant amply filled it. In the dim light of the closed, shaded room, her face disclosed itself more leathery and dark than ever, loose and flabby, the pouches beneath her eyes swollen by sleep to a still greater puffiness. Disturbed and fretful, she drew her nightdress about her neck; and it was a delicate, dainty nightdress Mrs. Pinchin wore, rich like all her other possessions and trimmed elaborately with ruffs and tuckers and shirring, its lace of a filmy texture. Against the deep, rusted, ivory tone of Mrs. Pinchin's throat its delicate daintiness contrasted strongly, perhaps curiously.

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Mrs. Pinchin dragged the bedclothes about her and shuddered regretfully. "Pity when I've got to get up, I say, that no one can be ready to wait on me." She shuddered again, though one would not have thought the room cold, for all the windows were tightly closed and their shades and blinds closely drawn. Perhaps, since the air was so warm, even stuffy, — perhaps Mrs. Pinchin shuddered from another cause, say the sheer discomfort of rising at such an outlandish hour. Reaching out her hands, she clawed up the spread a little higher about her chin, snuggling down into the great square of thickly-quilted, salmon-pink silk, and rolling her eyes around her moodily. "Have my breakfast on," she mumbled; "I'm coming down."

Corrie had her hand on the doorknob when Mrs. Pinchin called her back with a jerk of her head toward the window furthest from the bed. "Pull up that shade there! No — not like that!" she cried sulkily, "do you want to blind me?"

The girl patiently lowered it to the desired height, and Mrs. Pinchin having no further orders, she withdrew.

Mrs. Pinchin's bedroom, as revealed in the light, was significant of Mrs. Pinchin. It was a large, high-walled chamber, the best in the house naturally, and filled almost to overflowing with those frequent evidences of her love of material comfort and luxury. The furniture, all of the same bird's-eye maple as the bed, was equally massive and rich, and this richness was reflected elsewhere in the thick, silk hangings

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at the windows, the deep pile of Wilton on the floor, the tall mirrors, the profusion of chased silver on the bureau, the array of ornaments on mantel, shelf, and bracket; and, to top it all off, in the extraordinary, indeed amazing, variety of expensive cosmetics, balms, lotions, hair tonics, powders, and perfumes arranged on a shelf above her dressing-table. In themselves, they were a patent evidence of the care Mrs. Pinchin gave herself, yet no inventory of the room would be quite complete if one omitted the other comforts scattered around; such things, for instance, as the ribbon-bedecked basket of bonbons in easy reach of her bed, the decanter of sherry on a nearby stand, and the plate of vanilla wafers beside it. Little for either the inner or outer comfort of Mrs. Pinchin seemed omitted.

Downstairs in the dining room, Corrie found breakfast already on the table. Miss Maria had not yet appeared, but as Miss Maria was always prompt, Corrie knew she would be down directly. Beside the pantry door stood the waitress, Maggie, a new girl with stubby teeth and wide, carminous gums, and not altogether tidy in her dress. Her manner toward Corrie and Miss Maria was on all occasions a cross between a sullen sulkiness and pert indifference; for with a servant's ready wit in such matters, she had already divined the inferior positions of the two, the paid companion and the poor relation.

But Corrie, long accustomed to servants' indifference, ignored the girl's sullen, almost truculent manner. "You'll have to take off the breakfast,

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Maggie," she directed quietly; "we're not ready yet."

Naturally enough, Mrs. Pinchin insisted on being the first to sit down at her own board. Besides the sense of her own dignity, the sight of the others half through a meal, this and the broken food, always filled her with irritation — why, it would not be difficult to say; for the fact remains that if Mrs. Pinchin were not seated first and helped first and were not the first to taste whatever there was to eat, she at once became extremely upset and uncomfortable. Maggie, however, had come to the house too recently to know the meals were delayed only for Mrs. Pinchin; and jerking up her shoulder and sticking a hand on her hip, she seemed disposed to argue the matter spiritedly.

"Take it away, Maggie," repeated Corrie, giving no heed to the signals of war. "Mrs. Pinchin is coming down this morning, and she won't like it if the breakfast gets cold."

Out in the hall Corrie headed off Miss Maria. "We'll have to wait, Miss Maria; Mrs. Pinchin is coming down."

"Is she?" answered the other, inertly. She looked unusually peaked and wan, more downcast and subdued than ever, her pale eyes reddened about the rims and creased with deep wrinkles at their corners. There were few moments in which Miss Maria did not look dowdy and unkempt, and now she looked hopelessly and desperately so. But unlike the dowdiness that sometimes showed itself in Corrie, Miss Maria's

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lacked any single, redeeming feature, — the feature, for instance, of Corrie's surprising eyes, or the lithe-ness of her young, girlish form, even though the form were often hung in a plain, shapeless dress.

Curiously enough this morning Corrie's gown looked less shapeless, less plainly unattractive than her attire of the night before. It was perhaps just as simple, quite as unostentatious and unadorned; yet somehow, if one looked at Corrie once, one looked again, and instantly there dawned the fact of her shapeliness, the slender grace of her form, and the round fulness of her young, girlish throat. Nor, as one saw, was Corrie's hair any longer snaked back from her brow and wrung into a hard knot on her neck. Now it was piled into a coil, a soft mass of fine, silky brown, flashing in the light with the half-hidden, unexpected gleams of dulled metal, its sheen framing suitably the depth and shadowiness of her dark eyes. So perhaps, after all, there were moments when Corrie, at a pinch, could look attractive — moments when it seemed as if she almost cared to reveal herself a beauty.

It was not quite an hour later, but very nearly that, when Mrs. Pinchin came down. However, as Mrs. Pinchin's health did not admit of haste and the overexertion of hurry, Miss Maria and Corrie were prepared for the delay. Just before she completed her toilet, she rang again, and this time there was no delay in the answer to the summons. "Have the breakfast put on now," she ordered Corrie, as she stood up before the glass, carefully putting the last

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touches to her attire; "have it on when you hear me coming down. I won't be kept waiting."

She came stamping into the dining room eventually, and stood by her chair in silence until Corrie had drawn it out for her. Then Mrs. Pinchin hung her stick over the chair back and sat down ponderously, her eyes traveling about the breakfast table and going from that to the food on the smaller serving table near the pantry door. "Hand the fruit, girl," she directed sulkily to Maggie the waitress; and Maggie, still fretted and sullen at the long delay, scuttled across the carpet. But Mrs. Pinchin, it appeared, was far too intent on the breakfast to heed a servant's airs — either to heed that, or anything else but her food.

She was dressed for the morning in a figured, black brocade skirt and a rose-colored dressing sack trimmed with lace and long streamers of narrow pink satin ribbon. It hung loosely from her ample bust, the wide sleeve revealing Mrs. Pinchin's massive arm as she reached out to take an orange, — a corded, stalwart arm strongly in contrast to the loose flabbiness of her face and form. Her choice of the orange was slow and deliberate, as heavily precise as all her actions. She took one, felt it with a squeeze of her muscular fingers, regarded it closely, and put it back in the dish. Then she began picking up first one and then another, rejecting them in turn, until she found one that met her satisfaction. "Unh!" she grunted; but just as Maggie was about to pass the fruit to Miss Maria, Mrs. Pinchin glanced up side-

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ways and snatched another; the movement, in this instance, by no means so deliberate. Afterwards she cut the two oranges into quarters, and with her eyes on her plate and rolling from side to side, Mrs. Pinchin ate with the greatest gusto imaginable, her big teeth dexterously separating the rind from the pulp, and the smacking of her lips showing how she relished the taste.

The meal was disposed of in silence, what little talk there was limited to Corrie and Miss Maria, and then carried on in an undertone. After the oranges Mrs. Pinchin had her coffee, a hot roll, and a dish of oatmeal, and after the oatmeal came a chop and fried potatoes, followed by a plate of batter cakes. During the meal Mrs. Pinchin spoke only once, all her attention engrossed in the food; and when she broke her silence, it was only to ask for another helping of cream. While the oatmeal dish was being removed she did look up, however, as if to make some observation, perhaps about the weather, a topic always ready on her tongue and now probably in her mind, since she was staring out of the window. But the chop arriving at the same moment, Mrs. Pinchin fastened her eyes on it, and contented herself with another rumbling "Unh!" So it continued through the meal.

The last batter cake had just been cut into morsels on her plate when she spoke suddenly. "Have my carriage here at ten," she ordered abruptly, her mouth full, "and see to it that it's here on time."

Corrie watched her attentively. She and Miss

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Maria had long finished their breakfast, but as Mrs. Pinchin disliked to have anyone rise ahead of her, they ~~perforce~~ kept their seats. With both knife and fork going briskly, Mrs. Pinchin pursued the last fragment of pancake and the last drops of maple syrup to the edge of her plate, and there cornering the toothsome morsel, implacably speared it. A few touches with the knife served to scrape up the last remaining trickle of sweetness, and laying down her knife on the table, its edge resting on the plate, she raised the fork toward her mouth.

"I'll be out all day," she announced sharply, and with that bolted the batter cake. To answer seemed unnecessary; Corrie merely looked.

Crumpling her napkin into a ball, Mrs. Pinchin tossed it on the table, and reached around to the chair back for her cane. "Go get my engagement book," she directed, and, glad to be relieved, the girl sprang up from her seat. As she went up the stairs to Mrs. Pinchin's room she heard the thick voice murmur something in an undertone to Miss Maria, and then Miss Maria answered inaudibly. Corrie hastened on, knowing that Mrs. Pinchin disliked to be kept waiting, and, picking up the engagement book from the table, she retraced her steps to the dining room.

When she entered, Miss Maria was sitting with downcast eyes, her hands folded in her lap, and Mrs. Pinchin, also in silence, was thoughtfully munching the remains of the roll beside her coffee cup. She took the book from Corrie and turned to the page

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under the date. "Hmph!" she grunted, working her thick eyebrows into a frown; "I forgot all about the club reception. Tell that Freedlark woman when she comes I had some pressing business and could n't go." She twisted up her mouth into a grimace as she spoke, and chuckled in her throat. "She's expecting a free ride in my carriage; I guess she 'll be disappointed." Miss Maria, still silent and downcast, made no comment; and Corrie, equally mute, stood awaiting Mrs. Pinchin's wishes. "Hmph! nothing very much," commented Mrs. Pinchin, scanning the pencil notes on the page. "If anyone else calls, say I 'm out for the day."

She closed the book, ate the last crumb of the roll, and, taking a gulp of water, worked her lips up and down over her teeth. "I 'm going to my room now," she announced, picking up her stick, "and don't you let anyone bother me till it 's time for the carriage. Do you hear?"

Miss Maria hurried down the hall after her. "I 'm going out with you," Corrie heard her whisper, swiftly, determinedly; "I can't sit here and wait. I *must* go with you."

Mrs. Pinchin, still scrambling along down the hall, glowered at her roughly over her shoulder. "Go with *me*? You 'll do nothing of the sort. Think I 'm going to have you cutting up and ——"

A warning *sshsh!* uttered in an undertone cut her short. Corrie was already half way up the stairs, but the high walls had carried to her both the words and the hushed warning. Mrs. Pinchin and Miss

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Maria hurried along together, Miss Maria cautious but still determined, Mrs. Pinchin with her jaw set and looking angry. Opening a door opposite the entrance to the drawing-room, the two women entered, and Corrie heard the latch click as it was locked behind them.

The room was one that neither Corrie nor the maids were ever permitted to enter, Mrs. Pinchin's orders on this point being explicit and enforced. It was invariably kept locked, but once or twice Corrie had stolen a peep into its interior when Mrs. Pinchin had opened the door while Corrie was unexpectedly passing. There was a big desk topped by a rack of pigeon-holes standing in a corner, and beside it a cumbersome safe guarded by a combination lock. In this room Mrs. Pinchin securely closeted herself the first three days of every month, when from behind the closed door came the muttering of her voice and the clink of coin as if incessantly counted and recounted. On one occasion a glimpse into the room had shown the desk piled high with bundles of bank notes and rouleaux of gold and silver, — all this wealth, as Corrie knew, the month's income from Mrs. Pinchin's properties. In itself it indicated better than all else how well-to-do a person Mrs. Pinchin really was; the fact that she gave the stewardship into no other hands than her own attested to her interest and satisfaction in managing it.

This morning, however, Mrs. Pinchin had sought solitude not to gloat over her possessions, but for some other reason best known to herself. Never-

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theless, Miss Maria pursued, though apparently to little purpose; for no sooner had the door closed behind the two, than it was almost immediately flung open again, and the rasp of Mrs. Pinchin's voice was heard raised in irritation.

"How many times have I got to say it now? Come, stop your bawling, I say. You 've got to stay and do what I 've told you."

There was no answer, no other sound save a scuffle of feet along the hall carpeting. Corrie, a little curious — a little more than curious, now that she had sensed the strange occurrences going on in Mrs. Pinchin's — Corrie on the *qui vive*, leaned over the balusters and looked down. What was happening between the two strange characters, — these two women who had always acted strangely? And in what relation stood these queer happenings to herself? Corrie had many reasons to peep, so Corrie peeped.

There was Miss Maria painfully climbing the stair, her head turned back to look toward Mrs. Pinchin's room. She had a handkerchief pressed to her lips, and she was weeping silently, abjectly, piteously. Nor were her tears the tears that Miss Maria so readily gave way to — Miss Maria tired, uncomfortable, cross — the tears usual to a weak and, by nature, woe-begone spirit. They betrayed now, instead, every convincing sign of an intense and tragic misery, a sorrow of great emotion. Half way to the landing she paused suddenly in her funeral-like gait, and Corrie, watching and listening above, heard the thud of Mrs. Pinchin's stick along the hall.

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"Come, Maria," said Mrs. Pinchin's voice, softened now by a hint of kindness, "you must n't take on like that. I'd let you go, only the house can't be left."

She broke off there, her voice filled with meaning; and bowing her head, Miss Maria started again up the stairs. Instantly Corrie darted out of sight.

Promptly at ten o'clock, as ordered, Mrs. Pinchin's carriage drove up to her door. It was a small, lightly built brougham, its doors and side panels varnished black, its underbody checked in yellow in imitation of a cane chair seat. The running gear and wheels, together of a dark cobalt, were picked out in a lighter, more racy blue; and in place of being drawn by a single horse, as its build intended, a pair of chestnut roans, big and strong enough to have hauled a much larger equipage, were harnessed to its pole. One, the off horse, which was slightly the smaller of the two, displayed a tendency to go lame in the cannon-bone, where one saw it had been fired for the splint; but this infirmity was slight, and was more than balanced by the fact that a bog spavin on the hock of its mate was as bad, if not worse. Casually, one might have expressed the opinion that Mrs. Pinchin was able to support a sounder pair; but the fact remains that the horses were the first and only ones she had ever owned, and, though worn out and antique, they seemed to her only the more respectable because of their age. Their harness, in conformity with the lightness of the brougham, was itself light;

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little heavier, in fact, than that of a road wagon, though this was more than offset by the size and heaviness of the pole chains. They were large, highly polished, and noisy.

Mrs. Pinchin came down the steps supported on one side by the hand rail, on the other by the cane. At her heels Corrie followed bearing a light wrap, a large and bulging, silver-mounted reticule, and a thick brown veil; and at Corrie's heels followed Maggie, the waitress, her arms embracing a pasteboard box such as tailors use. One by one, wrap, reticule, veil, and paper box were loaded into the brougham under Mrs. Pinchin's directions, and then, with one hand on the carriage door, she gave her orders to the coachman.

“Go through the Park and down the Avenue. I'll let you know when I want to stop.”

Her man conformed in appearance to the rest of Mrs. Pinchin's turnout. He was a young mulatto, dressed in a light blue livery piped with red, cream-colored doeskins, high boots with russet tops, and, to finish off with, a silk hat topped with a black, shiny cockade. Lurching ahead under a touch of the whip, the roans started ponderously, and the carriage, bounding over the stones with a lively jingle and a clanking of its chains, passed off down the street and, turning at the corner, made for the nearest entrance to the Park.

On pleasant afternoons Mrs. Pinchin drove both there and in the Avenue; usually, however, in a C-spring victoria, very broad as to its girth and

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noticeably wide as to its mudguards. Her look on these occasions, as she lolled back among the cushions, was patterned after the same blank, austere expression one noted on the faces of the other carriage folk, who went junketing by in their own victorias, barouches, landaus, whatnots. But that Mrs. Pinchin, unlike them, had not altogether lost all interest in her surroundings was evident, now and then, in her little glances toward the other vehicles, by the manner in which she took note of their haughty-visaged occupants. It was a look of expectancy, as if Mrs. Pinchin awaited a bow, a nod of recognition from some one of the countless hundreds that rolled by in their oblivion of her and others like her. But somehow the eye turned furtively on the lookout rarely, if ever, recognized a familiar sail in all this argosy, though, of course, in a city as large as New York anyone might drive on forever and never chance on a friend.

To-day, however, Mrs. Pinchin wore no air of patiently awaiting a bow; she cast no sidelong glances into the nearby vehicles. She sat, instead, with her hand on the door of the brougham as if to propel it onward, and kept her face set straight before her. Once she leaned from the window and spoke sharply to the coachman. "Drive faster!" she ordered, and there was an answering clatter of hoofs on the asphalt as the roans sprang forward under the lash. Past Forty-second Street, Twenty-third Street, Fourteenth Street the carriage rolled on. At Ninth Street, however, Mrs. Pinchin stuck her head from the window. "Turn west," she ordered briefly; and the

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horses, swinging the corner, pounded their way along the dingy, old-fashioned street.

“Stop!” called Mrs. Pinchin, half her body protruding from the carriage window.

It might have astonished some of the lady’s closer acquaintances had they seen her at the moment. As she loved to tell them, she seldom walked, and under no circumstances whatever would she think of riding in a public conveyance. This statement was always accompanied by a shrug expressive of her distaste, as if to ride in a street car, for instance, were to offer one’s self voluntarily to all the perils of contagion, insult, pickpockets, even personal injury, — conditions which every gentlewoman should waste no effort to avoid. Furthermore, none of her acquaintances had ever met her in the street laden down with bundles, a contingency that on the face of it appeared to be absurd.

But, opening the door of her brougham, Mrs. Pinchin alighted and dragged after her the heavy pasteboard box. The wrap and the veil she had donned during the last stage of her drive; the reticule hung from her belt. Giving the black brocade skirt a flutter to arrange it, and shrugging her shoulders to settle the jet-trimmed wrap, she looked up and down the street. There was an alert air in her darkly tinted eyes, and her face under the brown veil and the almost turban-like bonnet she wore had, for the moment, lost its usual loose flabbiness of chin and jowl. “You go back to the stable,” she ordered, her stick waved up the street as if to point the way. “Go

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on, now; I don't need you any more," she added gruffly; "and don't you stop in anywhere on the way, mind you."

The astonished mulatto pulled his roans around. He, too, may have wished to ask questions, — the questions that any acquaintance of Mrs. Pinchin's might have wished to ask, — but the look on Mrs. Pinchin's grim visage was not the kind to invite inquiry. With another wave of her stick she sent him on the way, standing at the curb and looking after him. But the carriage had scarcely proceeded half up the block, when the coachman, despite the fact that Mrs. Pinchin might still be watching him, could no longer resist his curiosity. Swinging around on the box, his face still filled with bewilderment, he looked, and what he saw so profoundly interested him that he pulled up the roans and sat there, a rapt and wondering beholder.

For Mrs. Pinchin, her stick smartly thwacking the pavement, and the pasteboard box clenched under her arm, had darted over the Sixth Avenue crossing, and now at all her speed was fast disappearing into the outlying slums that fringe old Greenwich Village.

CHAPTER IV

Which may be described as a chessboard, whereon the several players display their strategy. — Reappears Mr. Stanton, Mrs. Pinchin's singular guest, in the suspicious character of an amateur cracksmen. — Miss Maria's aversion for her patron's friend. — Corrie's flight, and the search for the Missing Dwelling. — Greenwich Village. — The house with the green blinds, the white pillars, and the fan light over the door. — Corrie rings the doorbell.

IF the episode of Mrs. Pinchin abandoning her carriage in the streets seems curious, not less remarkable were the events in that lady's house immediately on the heels of her departure. Perhaps even remarkable cannot describe them.

The chestnut roans, ambling away from her door, had no sooner turned the corner toward the Park, when Corrie, darting for the stairs, made at full speed for her room on the top floor. She went noiselessly, her footfalls making little sound on the thick carpet; but she had no sooner turned the elbow of the stairs above the second story, when Miss Maria's door opened slowly, slyly, and Miss Maria stuck out her head. She still held the handkerchief to her lips, and her eyes, even more watery and inflamed than before, evidenced the tears she had so recently shed and still seemed ready to shed again at the slightest provocation. She stood for a moment listening; then tiptoeing to the stairway, she looked up

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over the balusters in an attitude of the deepest attention, and began guardedly to climb the flight. Once one of the treads creaked underfoot, and, pressing the handkerchief convulsively to her lips, Miss Maria waited before going on. Then, as her head reached the level of the floor above, she halted again, her eyes even with the floor; and like a scout spying over the crest of a hill, Miss Maria looked long and intently toward the door of Corrie's room. It was ajar, and, as Miss Maria peeped, Corrie stepped into the hall suddenly, her hat on, and a light jacket under her arm.

Instantly the watcher turned and fled down the stairway. Regaining her room at the foot of the flight, she shut the door softly, and then, almost at the same instant, flung it open with a loud rattling of the knob. "Corrie!" she vociferated. "Corrie! Corrie! Where are you?"

At the precise moment Corrie was leaning over the balustrade reconnoitering the floors below. She started guiltily. "Corrie!" cried Miss Maria again; and at the second summons the girl shrank back from the railing, and, tossing her coat behind her, snatched off her hat and threw it after the jacket.

"Yes, Miss Maria; what is it?" asked Corrie, walking half down the stairs.

If Miss Maria felt any astonishment at the girl's transformation — Corrie at one moment hatted and ready for the street, at the next bareheaded and without her jacket — if Miss Maria wondered, indeed, there was no hint of it in her face. "Why don't

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you answer?" she demanded vexedly. "I've been calling all over the house for you. What are you doing?"

Corrie answered frankly she had heard herself called only once. "I'm not doing anything, Miss Maria. Do you need me?"

Miss Maria's eyes dropped under the girl's firm look. "Mrs. Pinchin says you're to finish the household accounts," she grumbled peevishly; "she wants them when she gets back."

Corrie murmured an exclamation of astonishment. "The household accounts! Why, Miss Maria, I gave them to her last night."

The answer, direct in its unexpectedness, seemed to fill Miss Maria with confusion. "Why — now — why did you?" she stammered awkwardly; "well, I think it's very strange she didn't tell me. Anyway," added Miss Maria, sulkily, "there's plenty for you to do. Go finish sewing those mull ruffles on Mrs. Pinchin's tea gown. You'll hear from her if it is n't done!"

Corrie opened her mouth as if to say something, changed her mind, and came down the stairs. In Mrs. Pinchin's closet she found the tea gown, and while the fact remains that Corrie had already changed the ruffles as ordered, she folded the gown over her arm, the ruffles inside where Miss Maria could not see them, and walked back to her room.

Listening at the balusters, Miss Maria heard the girl shut her door. Yet even then she seemed unsatisfied, for dragging a rocker to where it com-

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manded a view of the stairway, she sat down with her sewing in her hand and began to rock furiously. That she was on the watch was of course evident; and that perhaps she had good cause to be on the lookout was no less evident ten minutes later, when Corrie tiptoed to the stairway and peeped over the rail.

Once more, Corrie wore her hat and coat, but instantly warned by the creak of Miss Maria's chair, she drew back hastily. There she stood, frowning and perturbed, and whatever were her reasons for wishing to go out, it seemed, for the moment, as if Miss Maria had outwitted her. But Miss Maria's strategy, as it turned out, lacked the same force and decisiveness as Mrs. Pinchin's. Corrie was going slowly back to her room when a thought struck her, a scheme that brought a smile leaping to her lips. For if Miss Maria had reasons to avoid ordering her pointedly to stay indoors, if Corrie dared not ask permission to go out, there was still a way to get around the matter.

The wide well of the stairway reached from the lower floor to the roof. Taking off her hat and coat, and rolling them together in a bundle, Corrie leaned over the rail until she could get a glimpse of Miss Maria bent above her sewing. "Now!" exclaimed Corrie to herself, and dropped the hat and coat through the stair well.

The bundle struck the lower floor with a light thump and bounded out of view. But light as the sound, Miss Maria had heard it, and she leaped up

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with an exclamation and ran to the balustrade. Nothing was to be seen, however; there was no one in sight, either above or below, and after peering up the stairs suspiciously, she returned to her seat, where she still sat and rocked and watched alertly. She was still at her vigil when Corrie came unconcernedly down the stairs.

The fact that the girl wore neither hat nor coat seemed to reassure Miss Maria that Corrie had given up all hope of stealing out of the house. "Don't forget she wants to wear that tea gown to-night," she warned again pointedly, and Corrie nodding, Miss Maria smiled faintly to herself, and once more bent over her sewing. The smile was as if in acknowledgment that the victory was her own.

But once in the lower hall, Corrie's manner of unconcern fell from her swiftly. Snatching up her hat and coat, she slipped into the dining room and hastily put them on before the sideboard mirror. The coast still was clear. Straightening her hat and tucking in her sleeves with a few hasty dabs, she turned and sped toward the front door. In a moment she would be in the street.

But in the same moment a key rattled sharply in the latch. Who was it — Mrs. Pinchin? Corrie halted, nervously. There was no time left either to retreat or to slip into the dimly shaded drawing-room on the right; but close beside her stood a tall, corpulent floor clock, an antique as to type, yet extremely modern as to its highly varnished woodwork and shiny metal. Any port in a storm, however, and with an

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agile movement the girl shrugged up close beside it, her form pressed tightly against the wall, her heart thumping as loudly as the measured *tick! tock!* of the timepiece.

As the door slowly opened, admitting a flood of light from the street, Corrie peeped — another peep in that morning's round of crafty, prying, furtive doings. A man stood in the doorway also peering cautiously, and it was Mr. Stanton, Mrs. Pinchin's familiar guest.

Listening a moment, he left the door open behind him, and turned quickly toward that small room on the left, the room where Mrs. Pinchin kept her desk and safe. Raising his hand, he tapped softly, waited a moment with his hawklike face fixed in an air of intense attention, and then tried the knob. It was locked, of course, as Mr. Stanton perhaps expected; for after a sharp look about him, he reached his hand into his pocket, and then drawing it forth fumbled a moment with the lock.

It was a movement so slight that Corrie could hardly detect it; nor was there any opportunity left to see what else he would do; for just then, as if suspecting her presence, Mr. Stanton turned swiftly and caught sight of Corrie peering from behind the clock.

As his eyes fell on her, his hawklike face displayed for an instant the least possible hint of confusion. "Ah! it's the dear young girl, is n't it?" he remarked, recovering himself, his tone easy and bantering. "Bound for a constitutional, I take it," he

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observed, noting her hat and jacket; "I trust I have n't detained you!"

Corrie emerged in confusion from her hiding-place. "No — not you — I thought it was Mrs. Pinchin," she faltered, the words slipping from her tongue in her embarrassment. Mr. Stanton laughed outright.

"What! The little bird is fleeing from the gilded nest?" he mocked jocosely; "from Mrs. Pinchin's ornamental birdcage?"

In the long time that Corrie had known Mr. Stanton, or rather, in the years she had seen him coming occasionally to Mrs. Pinchin's, his talk with her had been restricted always to just such bantering; this same jocose, mocking way of his. Perhaps because of it she kept a distance between them when she could, and never evinced the slightest wish to lessen it. "If you 're coming in, Mr. Stanton," she announced coldly, "I'll go out. Please let me by."

But instead of moving aside, he still kept his hand on the door knob, effectually blocking the way. "What! hurrying away from *me*?" he inquired, beaming jocosely. "Come, that is n't very nice of you."

Corrie's clear eyes looked at him unwaveringly. "Do you wish to see Mrs. Pinchin?" she asked abruptly, ignoring both the manner and the words. "I 'm most sorry to say she 's out for the day."

Immediately Mr. Stanton's merriment departed. "Eh — what? Out for the day!" he exclaimed. "Why I thought she never arose till noon. She said last night she 'd wait for me. Where 's she gone?"

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Corrie shook her head. "I have n't the slightest idea," she was answering, when Miss Maria's voice raised itself, crying shrilly from the floor above. "Corrie! Corrie! Where are you?"

At the first echo of the voice Corrie's self-possession fled. "Let me out, Mr. Stanton," she begged urgently, her head turned to watch the stairway. "Please let me out!" she pleaded insistently, and edging toward him, the girl tried to slip through the doorway.

Mr. Stanton, so far from standing aside, still blocked the passage, a faint, quizzical smile on his lips. "Ah!" he observed, drawling the words leisurely; "the little bird is, indeed, flitting from the nest. She is spreading her wings, notwithstanding."

Miss Maria was coming. "Corrie" she cried angrily, her suspicions obviously aroused; "what are you doing?"

There on the stairway Miss Maria halted abruptly, peering at the tableau in the doorway. She blinked for a moment, and then her eyes fixed themselves, not on Corrie, but on Mr. Stanton, and blankly stared at him.

It would have been difficult, from the expression, to identify Miss Maria's emotion. She stood rigid, her head perked forward, her rounded shoulders hunched up awkwardly. Never had Miss Maria seemed so dowdy, so inelegant, so ordinary and unattractive. Once she moistened her lips, and then, with an uneasy movement, raised her hand and brushed back a wisp of her ginger-hued hair. But whatever

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Miss Maria's feelings, Mr. Stanton on the other hand seemed confidently self-possessed. He looked back at Miss Maria, and on his thin lips was a smile at once gracious, benign, deferential, and utterly and unmistakably mocking. "Ah! it's Miss Maria, is n't it?" he ventured cheerfully. "Perhaps Miss Maria can tell where Mrs. Pinchin may be found?"

If Miss Maria could, she certainly made no effort to do so. Still silent, she still blinked at Mr. Stanton; and, after waiting a moment, he spoke again. "Where is Mrs. Pinchin?" he asked, and, leaving the door walked slowly toward her. "Where is she?" he demanded, and this time there was a ring of sharpness in his voice. "Come! I wish to know!"

But after another prolonged blank and expressionless stare, Miss Maria turned on her heel, and solemnly disappeared.

"Well, I'll be ——" began Mr. Stanton, grinning; and then looked around.

The hallway was deserted but for himself. Corrie, during the colloquy, had seized her opportunity, and darting through the doorway, was now hurrying down the street.

Some minutes later Corrie, quite breathless from her walk, boarded a southbound train on the "L." With her hands clasped tightly together in her lap, she gazed from the car window, her eyes fixed vacantly in thought. It was a deep thought, too, pertinent and accusing. The morning's events — the scene between Miss Maria and Mrs. Pinchin, Miss Maria's

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tragic tears, and afterwards her encounter with the singular Mr. Stanton — all this had stirred the girl's young mind unusually. For even Corrie, in her queer association with life, knew that morning's doings to be occurrences such as one should hardly look for in well-regulated, ordinary, self-respecting households. What was going on? What was the meaning of it, anyhow? There was even alarm in her mind as she recalled each one of the curious happenings. Who, indeed, was this Mr. Stanton? What, for instance, the antagonism, even the hatred that Miss Maria had shown for him? Had all this, too, something to do with Corrie's own case — the mystery of her origin? But even in the turmoil of her mind she shook her head at the thought — not in the least likely! But then again, what was it? Though ridiculous, absurd, impossible indeed, there came back to her the thought, the possibility, that once it all were solved, she would find in the solution the answer to her own other queries — Corrie *Who?* and Corrie *What?* On this very mission too, in fact, Corrie this morning had escaped from Mrs. Pinchin's.

It was not the first time she had stolen away on the quest. From the time Mrs. Pinchin had said her name was Robinson, from the moment she divined from the admission there was a hidden mystery about herself, Corrie had been carrying on a random hunt through the highways and byways. It was for a house she hunted — that same house of which she had spoken to Philip Geikie, Mrs. Pinchin's young and smiling guest. It was a double brick house with white pillars at the

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door, a fan light over it, green blinds on the windows and a queer little spindle railing on the steps. There Mrs. Pinchin, Miss Maria, and Corrie had lived at the time Corrie talked through a gap in the backyard fence. If Corrie could find the house again, she hoped to find, too, the snub-nosed, brown-haired boy who had tried to tell her what his father knew. Of course Mrs. Pinchin would n't clear up a thing like that, nor was Miss Maria likely to help her. No! she must find the boy himself. For Corrie by this time had decided that whatever the boy meant to tell her was just what Mrs. Pinchin would n't tell, and, at the same time, perhaps a reason why they all had flitted in the night time from the house she now was hunting.

All sorts of places had known her wanderings in search of it, — vagrant moments like this, when she had managed to escape from Mrs. Pinchin's. To-day — though Mr. Geikie had only joked — to-day Corrie headed herself for a new quarter, the twisted, haphazard, half-forgotten byways of quaint and quiet, down-at-the-heels Greenwich Village. A joke — yes! if one recalled the twinkle in Mr. Geikie's eye. But it was no joke to Corrie. She had caught at it as the drowning man clutches at a straw.

“Eighth Street!” bellowed the guard, thrusting back the car door; and Corrie, leaping up from her reverie, followed the few other passengers herding toward the platform. At the sidewalk she paused uncertainly. “Well,” she murmured, after a moment's reflection, “one way is as good as another. Besides, I 've got to try them all, anyway.” Turn-

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ing to the west, she hurried down Greenwich Avenue, and, crossing over to the other side, walked down the defile of a narrow, squalid side street.

The roar of the elevated, the clamor of cable cars, the clatter of trucks, carriages, and all the remaining noises of a busy life faded behind her like the murmuring voice of a heavy sea. Here the city and its striving seemed to have dropped a peg or two, perhaps even more than that, its key lowered many octaves to whispers, *pianissimo* and somnolent. An occasional knot of grimy-faced children shrilled at their play along the curbs, or it was a group of loungers at doorway or street corner, shawled women idly gossiping, men with nothing to do; the windows, opened to the spring sunshine, revealed glimpses of the dingy life within; a huckster, his voice softened and attuned by the distance, cried his wares beyond, and the further Corrie walked on from the avenue, plunging into the isolated quarter, the more sleepy and repressed grew the surroundings, the more detached and unfamiliar from the bustle and activity roaring closely on its sides.

Studying the houses as she went along, she turned corner after corner, intently on the lookout for that one particular mansion. At times she walked little side streets, quiet, peaceful byways lined with row after row of small, quaint-faced, old-fashioned dwellings, byways where unfretted silence pervaded as supremely as in the walks of a country churchyard. There were, occasionally, very neat little houses too, the brass plates and bell handles on their doors, the

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flags in front and their stone steps scrubbed as neat and clean as a pin; and even the persons that emerged from their doors or peeped from their windows seemed neat and clean and prim and restful, not at all like the crowds of that great city roaring by just at the street end.

Then came a part of the quarter where the houses grew more pretentious. They, too, were old-fashioned, quaint, and prim; in their size and architecture they recalled a period when persons of more than moderate circumstances had dwelt in Greenwich Village—well-to-do merchants, perhaps graduating into merchant princes, rising politicals advancing towards statesmanship, professional men edging into prominence — the upper middle class ready to burst from its chrysalis shell and wing away into upper realms. Corrie stared more intently at these bigger houses, her interest quickening at the sight of them. They seemed known, familiar, like something she had seen before. But all were so hopelessly alike, dozens and dozens of them, row after row together, that her mind became confused and bewildered with their number.

For all, or nearly all, had green shutters and fan lights over their doors, and some had white pillars and even the spindle railing — the very details that Corrie hunted. But in no case were all the details combined; one or the other was always missing in the general make-up, and, though ever tempted onward by some other house a little further along, she reached it only to know at a glance she must still keep on hunting for the lost, mysterious mansion.

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“Oh dear!” murmured Corrie, halting at a corner under a street lamp; “where am I? Ravine Street! Ravine? Ravine?” she repeated reflectively; “have I ever heard that name?”

There she stood, still looking at the sign, when a voice suddenly broke in on her reflections.

“It is, and — it is n’t,” uttered the voice laughingly. “Yes it is, — why it’s Miss Robinson after all.”

Corrie turned, and to her intense astonishment, it was young Mr. Geikie, hat in hand, regarding her with merriment.

“Why, where did you come from?” she exclaimed.

“Where did you drop from yourself?” he retorted. “Out of the skies? But I can guess; you’re hunting for your missing house.” Glancing up and down the block, he looked back at her drolly. “Found it yet?”

Corrie shook her head and made a little face expressive of despair.

“Dear! dear! that’s too bad!” he observed sympathetically, his eye covertly taking in Corrie’s trim change from the dowdiness of the night before, — the soft silkiness of her hair piled up beneath her hat, the shapeliness of her lithe young form revealed by the closely fitting jacket. But if the first look were covert, it was more than offset by his eyes’ succeeding gleam of frank admiration. “Sorry you have n’t had more luck,” he added sincerely. “Now, if you could only tell me a little more about it, maybe I — —” He broke off there, his eyes filled with fun.

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“ You have n’t told me yet *why* you ’re hunting it,” he laughed, “ or I ’d say advertise. There ’s nothing like it. *Lost*,” he laughed; “ *Lost*: a fairy castle of brick with green blinds, white pillars at the door, and a fan light. A suitable reward will be offered, and no questions asked.”

Corrie, too, after a moment, laughed with him. “ Yes,” she answered; yet there was a hidden gravity in her own whimsical words; “ it *was* a fairy palace, for in it dwelt an ugly duckling who was never allowed to become anything else. There was an old ogre who lived there, besides; and, all of a sudden, the castle vanished over night. Just because a Prince Charming with brown hair came riding up to the rescue. He had a snub nose, too! ” exclaimed Corrie. “ There! if you want to know! ”

The young man clucked his tongue in astonishment. “ My! my! all that happen in Greenwich Village, and never get into the newspapers? When did it all take place? ”

“ Ages and ages ago,” she replied with a light evasion of the true answer. “ But tell me,” she inquired, indicating with a glance the long row of old-fashioned dwellings, “ are these the houses you meant? I don’t seem to find mine among them.”

He shook his head promptly. “ These? Oh, no, indeed! Do you really wish to see a house such as the one you describe? ” His tone and manner were distinctly serious, yet if Corrie had watched him narrowly, she might have seen, as on the night before, another twinkle dancing in the corner of his eye.

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“My! I wish I could go with you! Can’t you put it off — say till this afternoon? Or to-morrow, maybe; I could go up to Mrs. Pinchin’s and get you.”

He looked at her pleadingly; but Corrie shook her head, her eyes filled with amusement. “Oh, won’t you let me?” he asked again. “I can’t tell you how much I’d like it.”

“So would I, Mr. Geikie. I’m sure I would, and then” — a telling pause — “I’m just as sure Mrs. Pinchin would n’t.”

The young man boyishly wrinkled his brow with disappointment. “Well, if you won’t, then I suppose I’ll have to let you go alone. But look out,” he cried, his face breaking anew into its smile, as if at a hidden joke; “look out some ogre does n’t jump out of that house and grab you; for I’m sure it’s the same one, the very house, or one as much like it as two peas in a pod. Two blocks straight away, and then turn to the left. You’ll see it across the street, No. 57 Hedge Street, and mind! — look out for the ogre!”

Corrie shook hands with him, and repeating the number, 57 Hedge Street, left him standing on the corner. Half-way down the block she looked back, and he was still waiting there, as if to be sure she knew the way. “Oh!” she murmured, a faint pink stealing into her cheeks; and ignoring the hand waved gaily at her, she hurried onward faster.

At the second block she turned as directed. It was another of those quaint little streets, a remnant of bygone, old-fashioned New York, and now fast going to seed. On the corner an ugly, modern

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apartment house raised its yellow, gingerbread face, its cheap and tawdry decoration a strong contrast to the simplicity of the ancient dwellings under its lee. On the street level a grocery of the smaller kind filled the air with the reek of salted fish and spice and the odor of wilted fruit and vegetables displayed on the racks outside; and in the doorway the aproned grocer and two women with shawls over their heads haggled stridently. This was the only sign of life visible in the block.

Corrie hurried past, and the instant her eyes fell on the houses opposite she uttered a murmur of astonishment. No. 57 Hedge Street! — there it was! And No. 57, too, was a double brick house, green shutters at the windows, pillars at the door, a fan light over the entrance, and a thin, gracefully wrought, iron spindle railing at the front. Corrie, her heart thumping, paused and stared. It was, as young Phil Geikie had said, as alike as two peas in the same pod — an exact duplicate, a twin, a brother to the house she sought.

“No!” gasped Corrie; it was the missing mansion itself! Could there be a mistake? She took her eyes from it, and bit her lip in thought. The house she hunted had, as she recalled, stood on the uptown side of the street; this was on the downtown. But it had been a long while ago; her memory must be at fault. Again she looked back at it. The house was the one she looked for — the one she had so patiently hunted up and down the highways, byways, streets, and avenues of the town! There could be no

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error, for back in her mind its image had always lived, an image that had survived with other memories of the long ago among vague details of her early childhood. Trembling, eager, emotional, she stood rooted to the curb, gazing at the house, a flood of recollections pouring back into her head at the sight of the old, familiar face. Unlike its fellows — though nearly all were still trimly kept — it wore an added air of smartness, a neater, distinguishing tone of gentility above the middle class. *A gentleman's house*, one instantly would have said; and, beside its dignified simpleness the rowdy, swaggering tenement on the corner seemed to fade away, and in place of the two shawled drabs haggling with the aproned grocer, one might have looked to see a buck in strapped pantaloons, and high, furred beaver doing the elegant before a pair of hoopskirts and crinoline.

For a moment Corrie gazed at its windows, almost expecting to catch a glimpse of either Mrs. Pinchin or Miss Maria, or, perhaps, of her own younger self peering forth in gingham and pigtails. But no such vision appeared; no ogre, either, darted forth, as if out of a nightmare, to drag her to a dark upstairs room. Alone she stood and looked, watching, debating, wondering. Was it really, really and without mistake, the house? Now that she had found it, she must make sure without a doubt.

So crossing the street, after this moment's hesitation, Corrie walked up its steps, and, with her breath coming fast, deliberately rang the doorbell.

CHAPTER V

Mrs. Pinchin's homecoming, and the resultant misery of her poor relation. — What happened when Mrs. Pinchin found that her lock had been tampered with. — The old-fashioned portrait album, and its picture of the woman with the dark, shadowy eyes. — Mrs. Pinchin's accusation, and her companion's unlooked-for attitude. — Why Corrie had been adopted. — Mrs. Pinchin figuratively alights from her equally figurative high horse. — Her fear of a stroke.

THE shades had been drawn, the gas already lighted at Mrs. Pinchin's when that lady herself limped painfully up the street and climbed the front steps of her house. In the fading light of the dusk, one saw that her almost turban-like bonnet was tilted back from her head, and that the brown veil hanging from it had been thrust away from her face and rolled up into a thick, disordered fold. Both from Mrs. Pinchin's haggard look and the way her cane dragged along the stonework one knew her to be fatigued, thoroughly tired out — an unaccustomed weariness in one of her self-indulgent nature. Nor, it appeared, had Mrs. Pinchin's temper become improved by either her fatigue or her day away from home; for when she rang her doorbell, she had no sooner removed her finger from the button than she put it back again and held it there, pressing firmly. Also, while she waited, Mrs. Pinchin beat a lively

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tattoo on the door with her stick, occasionally pausing to rattle the knob energetically.

It was Miss Maria who answered, at last. She pulled open the door timidly, and was just peering forth to see who announced herself with such vigor, when a hearty push nearly sent her head over heels backward into the hallway.

“Well!” snorted Mrs. Pinchin, stalking into the light. “Is this the way my house is run during my absence?”

Leaning her cane against the hatstand, she dragged off her hat and veil irritably, and tossed them down beside her. “Well?” she snapped again, and both the word and the glare that went with it voiced an anxious inquiry. “Well?” she repeated.

Miss Maria, after closing the door behind Mrs. Pinchin, had turned with her fingers nervously entwining themselves. She seemed not to have heard the other’s question. “What has happened?” she asked rapidly, one of her hands stealing to her breast to pluck at the hem of her waist. “Oh, don’t keep me waiting!” she pleaded. “Have you no news for me?”

Mrs. Pinchin deliberately went on unfastening the hooks of her wrap. “News? Huh! stop looking at me like that! Don’t you suppose I’d tell you if there was any?” Her manner was dark, moody, more than peevish — not merely fretful because of her fatigue. “There’s nothing to tell you. There’s no change at all.”

Again Miss Maria twined her fingers together

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and crept a little closer. "Oh, can't you tell me anything — something more than that?" she pleaded, indeed implored. "Are you keeping anything away from me?"

At once Mrs. Pinchin turned on her belligerently. "You see here!" she growled, almost grunted, such was the thickness of her voice; "have n't I told you once there was no change? What more do you want?" Ruffled and irate, she stripped the wrap from her shoulders and scowled darkly; her thick lips pressed themselves together, working vigorously. It was obvious, whatever the cause of Miss Maria's suppliance, whatever the reason for the misery in her face, that Mrs. Pinchin felt no sympathy for it. Instead, it seemed only to add irritation to the already strong emotions under which she herself was laboring. "Where's that girl Corrie?" she demanded suddenly. "What's she been about all day?"

It was no very good account that Miss Maria had to give of Mrs. Pinchin's paid companion; or, at least, so Mrs. Pinchin thought. For — "What!" she exclaimed, her eyes gleaming like embers beneath her drooping lids, her voice filled with exasperation; "and you let her get out, after what I told you?"

Miss Maria tried to falter explanations. "That man — him," she began hesitatingly; "you know the one" — this meaningly — "he stood at the door talking to her, and I could n't get down and stop her."

But the explanation, so far from appeasing Mrs. Pinchin, served only the more to enrage her.

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"That's the way it always is!" she cried excitedly, her flabby jowls trembling with intensity; "everything goes to sixes and sevens, of course, unless I'm here all the time. Why did n't you stop her, I say?"

Miss Maria twisted her fingers nervously together again. "Why, how could I?" she faltered miserably; "he was there, and ——"

A snort interrupted her. "You mean to say —— Oh, fiddlesticks! huh!" growled Mrs. Pinchin, contemptuously. "Honestly, Maria, I don't believe you have the spirit of a gnat!"

She began lifting up the hem of her skirt while she spoke, her hand fishing into an inner, hidden pocket. "Oh, well!" she muttered crossly, producing a bunch of keys that rattled emphasis to her words, "I suppose I'll have to stand the burden of everything in this house, won't I?" Selecting one of the keys, she stuck it into the door of the room at her side. "Huh, Maria!" she had begun to say again, when of a sudden she stopped, and glanced downward curiously. With a wrench of her strong fingers, she unlocked the door, shoved it open, and then pulled out the key. "Who's been in this room, to-day? Who's been tampering with this lock?" whispered Mrs. Pinchin in a hissing shrillness; and, with the words, the leathery hue crept from her face and a pasty pallor crept into it. "Tell me!" she cried furiously, for on the key was a thick smear of some waxy substance; the lock seemed clogged with it, too.

Miss Maria gasped at her stupidly. "Who's

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been in my room?" repeated Mrs. Pinchin, her face terrible. "I say someone has been here!"

But nothing had been disturbed; the room, so far as she could see, was as she had left it in the morning. She turned around again to Miss Maria, and Miss Maria helplessly shook her head. "I don't know — unless *he* tried — that man, I mean! Maybe — —"

Miss Pinchin again silenced her with a snort, her teeth bared in contempt. "Him? — you idiot! — you ninny!" she mocked derisively. "I suppose you'd accuse him of anything. Come now, get your wits about you! Who's been working at this lock?"

But without waiting for the answer, Mrs. Pinchin straightened up with a jerk. "I know who it was!" she cried, certainty and a kind of questionable triumph in her voice; "it was that girl. Yes, it was! Did n't I warn you she'd be up to some such trick, snooping and sneaking around, sticking her nose into my affairs." In her anger whatever elegance or nicety of speech Mrs. Pinchin possessed now seemed to have left her. "I'll fix her, though. I'll know if she's going to spy on me," she grated threateningly. "You see about dinner. I'm going up to settle with her now!"

Hopping to the hatstand, Mrs. Pinchin snatched up her cane, and thumped away up the stairs. At every step she pounded the floor noisily, and at every thump she tossed her head on her shoulders. "The hussy! I'll attend to her. I'll see! I'll see!" she

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cried truculently, dragging herself along by the handrail; and so nursing her wrath and in a mood to free her mind of many things, Mrs. Pinchin climbed to the top floor where she unceremoniously thrust open the door of Corrie's bedchamber.

"You!" cried Mrs. Pinchin, and levelled her cane at the girl.

Corrie, standing at a table near the gas bracket, was slowly turning the pages of a book. It was a fat, leather volume, fitted with a brass clasp, and filled with many portraits of a day long ago. One face among them appeared again and again, — singly or in a group of other faces — a young, dark-eyed woman, the softness of whose dark eyes and quiet smile still lived in the dim, faded prints. Who was she? Corrie, gazing pensively back into the eyes, was wondering who when the door fell open at Mrs. Pinchin's noisy entrance. "You!" cried Mrs. Pinchin; and Corrie, with a movement inconceivably swift and secretive, thrust the book behind her and beneath a pile of other books that lay there on the table. Pale, disturbed, yet still in command of herself, she faced both the cane and the woman who held it; and so they stood — one white and still, the other shaken with wrath.

"What is it you wish, Mrs. Pinchin?"

The cane wagged itself at Corrie like a huge, accusing finger. "Injured innocence, hey?" she mocked scornfully. "Come! none of that! I know what you've been up to!" she snapped, her cane again wagging its signal of righteous rage. "What

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'do you mean by going into my room unasked? — like a housebreaker, too!'

"Your room? — unasked?" echoed Corrie, bewilderedly. "I went into your room to get your gown to sew the ruffles on it, Mrs. Pinchin."

Mrs. Pinchin stamped the floor with both cane and foot together. "Don't you try to evade me like that!" she warned. "None of your stories now. You know where I mean. You've been snooping in my room downstairs — the room where I keep my desk. I want to know the reason why."

Corrie drew in her breath, again bewildered. "The downstairs room? I haven't been near it. What do you mean?"

Anyone possessed of less rage than Mrs. Pinchin must have known that Corrie spoke the truth. But so far from believing her, Mrs. Pinchin worked her jaws irately, and again menaced Corrie with her stick.

"How dare you tell me such a story? How dare you?"

"Stop!" said Corrie, firmly. "Stop, Mrs. Pinchin!"

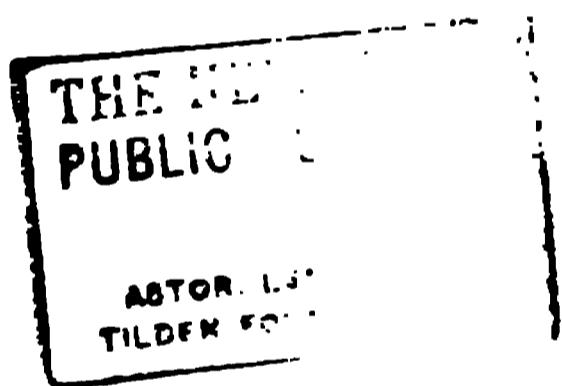
Mrs. Pinchin stopped, gaping and dumbfounded. It was the first time in a long while that anyone had dictated to her; to be told to stop — to be denied even the slight privilege of tongue-lashing her paid companion — must have seemed incredible.

"Stop!" repeated Corrie, quietly; "you must not speak to me like that."

"Talk to you — like what?" stammered Mrs.



“Stop!” said Corrie, firmly. “Stop, Mrs. Pinchin!” Mrs. Pinchin stopped, gaping and dumbfounded.



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Pinchin, foolishly, now thoroughly nonplussed. "Have you the audacity — ?"

The girl silenced her with an uplifted hand. "Mrs. Pinchin," she said, with a simple dignity in strong contrast to Mrs. Pinchin's warmth, "I wish you would sit down for a moment. I have something I'd like to say to you. Sit there, won't you?" she asked, gravely pointing to a chair at the other's side.

Gasping, gaping, still dumbfounded and dazed, Mrs. Pinchin tried for a moment to regain her waning mastery. But the scowl failed in its purpose, and with a snort, a rumbling mutter of wrath, Mrs. Pinchin sat, or, rather, she fell limply, on the chair that Corrie pointed at. "I think I shall have a stroke — another stroke!" Mrs. Pinchin echoed to herself. "This girl will be the death of me!"

Corrie stood looking down at her reflectively, pausing a moment while Mrs. Pinchin worked her jaws up and down. "Mrs. Pinchin, you adopted me, did n't you?" she asked abruptly, and then went on, as if she took Mrs. Pinchin's glare for her answer. "You adopted me, but I 've yet to learn where you got me. I 've yet to learn, too, *why* you adopted me, and *why* you brought me up. I suppose I ought to be grateful to you, and perhaps, if I only knew the truth, I might be. But I don't know the truth, Mrs. Pinchin. I don't know who I am, or even what I am — whether I have a name, or even a right to one. But now I 'm going to find out! Will you tell me, Mrs. Pinchin?"

During these few words, Mrs. Pinchin had ceased

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to work her jaws, though she still frowned; and presently, putting both hands over the stick, she leaned forward and forced a grin to her lips. It seemed as if she were almost amused.

"Oh!" cried Corrie, suddenly thrusting out both hands. "Oh, please, please, Mrs. Pinchin, won't you tell me my name — my real name?"

The grin grew a little wider, almost sardonic. "Name? How often must you be told it's Robinson?"

Corrie drew back sadly. "No," she murmured distressfully, "it is not that — not even Robinson — Brown or Smith or Robinson. That was just a cruel untruth of yours. I've at least learned that."

The grin died suddenly, replaced by a look almost of consternation. "What's that you're saying?" demanded Mrs. Pinchin, leaning a little closer, her eyes turned searchingly on the girl's. "You've learned? Who's been talking to you? Who's told you it is n't Robinson?"

"No one has been talking to me, Mrs. Pinchin. No one needed to tell me. I know it myself."

Mrs. Pinchin shook herself. Some of the uneasiness died out of her face; her wrath regained itself instantly. "You say I've told you an untruth! How dare you!" she repeated bellicosely.

But the girl was not to be silenced now. "It was an untruth," she retorted sorrowfully; "and you knew it to be untrue when you told it. But you know who I am, Mrs. Pinchin, I am very sure; and oh, if you'll only tell me, I'll work for you day

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and night, Mrs. Pinchin — I 'll stay with you for ever and do all you tell me. But won't you please, please, *please* tell me who I am? Just that — and I won't ask you any more."

"*Who you are!*" croaked Mrs. Pinchin, lurching up from her chair and shaking her stick at the pleader. "You 're a bold, ungrateful hussy — that 's what you are! Your name is Robinson, and I got you out of a beggar's hovel, and if the name does n't suit you," she cried, all in a breath, "you can take one to suit yourself! Who you are, indeed!" she repeated. "Why, for half what you 've said to me, any other woman would turn you out of doors!"

Corrie waited for the outburst to end itself. "There won't be any need to turn me out, Mrs. Pinchin," she responded, once more a wistful smile on her lips, "for I am going away from you of my own wish, — without waiting for you to dismiss me. Shall it be to-morrow, or — to-night? I have very little to pack."

Perhaps Mrs. Pinchin was unready; perhaps she had not expected this. Again her mouth opened; in her amazement, the wrath faded from her face, and with every indication of astonishment and dismay, Mrs. Pinchin fell back on the chair again and gazed at Corrie.

"Going? Going away?" she repeated, under her breath, and in all the many contending bursts of her passion, changes from contempt to wrath, amusement to rage, dismay to insulting anger, this swift turn

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to consternation appeared the most powerful emotion of all. "Going away? You sha' n't! I won't let you. You sha' n't — you sha' n't!"

"Yes, Mrs. Pinchin; though you adopted me, I am at least my own master now. Unless you tell me who I am, I shall go away."

Mrs. Pinchin drew a heavy breath. She took a fresh grip on her cane handle, and, averting her eyes, for a long while studied the threadbare carpet of her companion's room. Corrie waited silently, and then when Mrs. Pinchin spoke again, it was as if Mrs. Pinchin, in the minute's deliberation, had come to a quick decision. Leaning a little closer, she noisily cleared her throat.

"My dear, dear young girl," she began, her tone almost placating, and halted when she said it. The change had been too abrupt, perhaps, for, clearing her throat, Mrs. Pinchin tried again in a less endearing strain. "My girl," said she, with an uneasy gentleness in her voice, "you must n't leave me. I could n't think of that. Why!" she exclaimed, boldly attempting a note of pity; "where could you go, a frail, young thing like you? No; you must n't think of it. You must stay with me, dear. Perhaps it's hard for you; for I know, of course, I'm a cross and irritable old woman. But I don't mean anything by it. I — I — why, I just lose my temper, that's all. Yes!" she affirmed eagerly; "but I don't mean anything by it. Now just you forget I've been so cross, Corrie, and we'll try to get along better in the future. Yes, — yes, we must. And you must n't

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work so hard after this, either. I 've been noticing, lately, you look tired. You must make the maids help you. Yes! I can't have you tiring yourself out. So now it 's settled, is n't it? " croaked Mrs. Pinchin, suddenly, and looked at her with the brightest, most hopeful expression in the world.

Corrie gazed at her with troubled eyes. " I don't know, Mrs. Pinchin. Are you going to tell me who I am? "

Mrs. Pinchin's lips opened swiftly as if about to say something, but after a slight contortion of her face, she emitted only a dry, chocking gulp. " Oh, yes! About yourself, of course, Corrie! " she answered, the spasm in her throat passing away. " Honestly, now, I 've told you all I know. Their name *was* Robinson; and they lived in one of my houses. They moved away afterward, and — oh, yes, as I remember now, they owed me a lot of rent — months and months unpaid rent. I 've forgotten how much, but I think — let me see — why, it was more than six months, all that, anyway. No, you 've no idea how much rent people have gone away without — " "

" Which house did they live in, Mrs. Pinchin? " asked Corrie, interrupting the tale of Mrs. Pinchin's delinquent tenants.

" Which one? " echoed Mrs. Pinchin, swiftly, her eyes darting at her. " Oh, I forgot. No, I remember now. It was torn down, years and years ago — to make way for a — for a — why, a bake-shop! " she ended, with a gulp.

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Corrie fastened her eyes on Mrs. Pinchin and kept them there. "You remember no more, then, Mrs. Pinchin?" she asked slowly; "and it is the truth you 've told me?" she went on hollowly. Mrs. Pinchin nodded and continued to nod, vigorously and with growing emphasis. "Very well, then, Mrs. Pinchin; I shall stay here as you say. For I think some day you will remember more about it, and then, of course, you will tell me. Perhaps it will be when you are dying, Mrs. Pinchin," the girl added remorselessly, ignoring the pallor that leaped into the other woman's face at the words; "on your death-bed, Mrs. Pinchin. Perhaps you will tell me then."

As Mrs. Pinchin limped down the stairs, her hand went fluttering to her throat. She gained her room, and without waiting to turn up the lowered light, hastened to the stand near her bed. There stood the decanter of sherry, and filling a glass, her hand trembling so that the wine spilled over, Mrs. Pinchin gulped it down. Immediately, she filled a second glass, and sipping this more slowly, her nostrils distended and her thick lips smacking loudly, she dully looked around her.

"Some day — some day," she muttered brokenly; "some day I shall really have another stroke. A real stroke!" she repeated in a hollow whisper; "some day I shall have a *stroke*. I must be more careful of myself!"

CHAPTER VI

Relating the extraordinary results achieved by ringing the doorbell of an unknown New York house. — Little Mr. Biggamore and his garden. — The house at the rear. — Mr. Biggamore's peculiar behavior concerning his unknown neighbor. — Corrie's dismay and hopelessness. — The Missing Dwelling at last! — Reappearance of Mrs. Pinchin, its significance, and Corrie's justifiable alarms.

THE mere act of ringing a doorbell, when one knows who lives within, is, in itself, a matter of no great significance, either dramatically or otherwise. But to walk up to an unknown portal, especially in a secluded quarter of New York — to climb the steps and to jerk the bell hanger, even though it be done with the utmost confidence — this, one must allow, is fraught with no end of possibilities, and notably so, if one has no very substantial reasons for ringing.

But Corrie has been left standing on the steps of an unknown person's house, absorbed in this very venture. She rang, as it has been said, and at the first submerged tinkle in the dwelling's depths, she awoke with a start to the impulsive absurdity of her position. For who would answer the bell, and what should she say to them when they came? All in a flutter, Corrie waited, flushing with self-consciousness, and tempted a dozen times to take to her heels in flight.

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It was a broad door before which she trembled so uncertainly — a door portly, well-kept, and dignified. Directly at the center of its panelling a highly polished letter drop gleamed like an alderman's watch chain; and above and about on a level with Corrie's head an antique knocker shaped into a satyr's head, with a garland hanging from its teeth, handsomely stared her out of countenance, grinning as if aware of her confusion. Corrie was still frowning back at its impudence when the sound of footfalls within warned her to be ready.

The door opened, and a face cautiously obtruded itself. It was a servant, she saw to her relief, some sort of an ancient retainer wearing neither cap nor apron, and with the New York servant's early morning manner, on guard against unwelcome intruders. But a glance at Corrie seemed to reassure her, and she threw open the door widely, and respectfully stood at one side.

“Good morning,” said Corrie; “I would like to see your mistress.”

The aged retainer's air of caution returned. “Not at home, ma'am. She ain't either, 'cause she's just gone out.”

Corrie wrinkled her brow disappointedly. “Is any other member of the family at home, then?” she inquired, after a thought.

The servant eyed Corrie dubiously, as if all early morning visitors were open to her suspicion. “Dunno, ma'am; I'll go ask him,” she answered, with unwitting frankness, and with another cautious

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stare grudgingly invited Corrie into the hallway, and left her standing there.

Corrie waited, her eyes flitting about, and a host of memories charging through her mind. It was the same old hall, she saw excitedly, the same stairway she had known of old, though the decorations and furnishings had suffered a change since Mrs. Pinchin's reign. A thorough change, too, one would have said; for in place of a florid array of bric-a-brac and the flashy choice Mrs. Pinchin made of upholstery, hangings, and pictures, Corrie got a glimpse of a quiet and dignified interior. On the wall beside her, for instance, a small, exquisite etching, a fragment like the chip from a gem, replaced the still life of fruit Corrie remembered; opposite it hung another, equally small and choice, and lining the stairway as far up as she could see, the rising wall was filled with rare old copper prints, rarely chosen, a few old time woodcuts, and here and there a touch of color, quaintly antique. A tall clock, also genuinely old, ticked solemnly by the wall opposite the newel post, and beyond it a divan with claw feet and a deep, comfortable back sprawled easefully, the very look of it cheerfully inviting repose. Corrie took note of this and was trying to peep further, when a labored breathing on the basement stairs warned her of the servant's return.

“Please, ma’am, he says if you ain’t a book agent or anything, you are to come down. Mr. Biggamore’s in the garden.”

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"In the garden? — oh, thank you," murmured Corrie, nodding. She had started on the way unconsciously, when the servant's exclamation of astonishment stopped her. "Would n't you be letting me show you the way, ma'am?"

It was hardly necessary, but realizing the home was no longer hers, Corrie let the servant precede her. But unguided, alone, blindfolded, or in the dark, she could have traveled that passage surely and with certainty, knowing every inch of the way from the hallway to the garden at the rear.

Their way led by the dining room and through the tall French windows to the porch outside. Corrie, as she went along, took in the old, familiar room, its high walls, its open fireplace and marble mantel, its dark woodwork and the queer, old-fashioned bronze gas brackets and chandelier. But now it all wore a changed habit, a newer look of distinction; its mahogany table, richly polished and as deep in tone as the breast of a forest pool; its sideboard and china closets, its Sheraton chairs, its plate and ornaments of Delft, and, on the walls, its ancestral portraits in oil all harmonizing closely with the prim, old-fashioned character of the house.

"Mind the step, ma'am," cautioned the servant, and Corrie nodded again, as she walked out to the porch beyond. For how often, as a child, had she crossed that step, skipped along the high veranda, and so gone on into the garden that lay there below! Her eyes sparkled, a lively color mounted her cheeks, and she lived as a child again, animated and eager.

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So Mr. Biggamore saw her as she came down the steps toward him.

He, too, harmonized with this retreat of his, a person as quaintly old-fashioned as one would expect to find in these quaint, old-fashioned surroundings. A pair of large, steel-rimmed spectacles balanced themselves on the tip of Mr. Biggamore's nose, and in his long-tailed coat, his flapping wide-awake and broad, thick, white scarf, fastened with a coral pin, he looked not unlike some little old gentleman just stepped out of the pages of an early century almanac.

But for one with a name so suggestively stalwart and ample, Mr. Biggamore somehow fell short of the expectations, being neither burly nor majestic, but, on the other hand, rather more chubby than anything else, and almost boyish in the rotundity of his figure. A wisp of hair hung over his right brow, and in moments of meditation, or when he was interested or excited or otherwise moved, Mr. Biggamore reached for it, and slowly twined it about his finger, his head perked at one side during the process, and his eyes, like a bright little bird's, peering out intently from under his hand.

Resting on his shovel, he looked up at the girlish visitor with a very sudden astonishment. "Why — why —my dear young lady!" he exclaimed, in quick apology. "My servant told me she thought — Why, let me hand you to the drawing-room, won't you?"

Corrie thanked him shyly, and begged they might stay where they were. "You must be very busy, Mr.

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Biggamore. Besides, I shall trouble you only a moment."

Mr. Biggamore beamed rotundly. "Trouble? No trouble at all, I assure you. Please be seated. Greatest pleasure in the world."

He bowed her to a chair placed directly in the center of the garden, a wide-armed, comfortable, deep-backed, rustic garden seat set evidently where Mr. Biggamore could pore upon his cheerful little domain. For it was a queer, quaint little garden, too, in keeping with everything else. On all sides the fenced area of backyard held a bewildering oasis of its own, a massed square of color filled with flowering bulbs — tulips, snowdrops, hyacinths, and daffodils blooming exotically in the heart of the city's desert of ugly brick and stone. From a further corner a wistaria vine sprang upward to a high lattice carried above the fence, and with this screen as a background and the amazing flame of color underfoot, one almost forgot the crowding houses so near at hand, the city's crowded life, and, for the moment, dreamt it to be the quiet of a far-away, country nook.

"Pleasure, I assure you! Just pottering; that's all. Miss — er, Miss — Miss Delevan, you said, was n't it?"

Corrie had n't said at all, as she laughingly answered. "I'm Miss Robinson, however, Mr. Biggamore — Miss Corrie Robinson," she added, and at her frank amusement Mr. Biggamore, too, had to laugh, or, rather, he exploded into merriment, his chubby form shaking gleefully. "Well — oh, yes!

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Miss Robinson — Robinson, that 's it. Not Delevan in the least. Merely tried Delevan as a graceful way of finding out.” He peeped again over his spectacles and beamed at her, a queer, benevolent little person, so cheery and genial and full of evident kindness that Corrie felt assured she could trust herself to him. “ Well now, my young lady,” he inquired, curling his forelock reflectively, “ how can I have the honor of serving you? ”

Corrie came down to the moment with a start. How? Why, she hardly knew. Mr. Biggamore, having twirled his wisp of forelock a while, took off his spectacles and carefully wiped them with a large, flowered silk handkerchief, which he extracted with a flourish from his coat-tails. Afterward he adjusted the glasses on the endmost tip of his nose, and, having laid hold of his forelock again, once more beamed at her encouragingly, nodding his head the while and teetering to and fro with his other hand behind him.

“ Why,” exclaimed Corrie, diffidently, “ I don't just know. In the beginning — ”

“ In the beginning? Excellent! ” observed Mr. Biggamore, promptly. “ No place like the beginning to begin. Let 's begin there. In the beginning — ”

“ In the beginning, then, Mr. Biggamore,” answered Corrie, smilingly taking her cue, “ I 'm looking for some people who once lived here. I mean in this neighborhood,” she added cautiously, resolved not to commit herself until she learned just what he knew of Mrs. Pinchin. A misstep might cost much now; for what would Mrs. Pinchin do were she to

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learn that Corrie, indeed, was *snooping* — this snooping she disliked so much. "And if you will tell me who owns this house," she went on after the moment's thought, "it would be a great help to me. I think it 's the one I 'm looking for."

"Who owns it?" Mr. Biggamore smiled benignly. "Easiest thing in the world to tell you, my young lady. *I* own it, — house, grounds, garden, — everything! No. 57 Hedge Street; P. Biggamore, owner."

Corrie lacked a clear idea whether he was poking fun at her or not. But encouraged by his twinkling eyes and his general aspect of chubby cheerfulness, she went on easily. "Oh, yes — and I think you bought it from a Mrs. Pinchin, did n't you?" she suggested, in an off-hand tone, as if carelessly aware of the fact. "That was the person's name, if I am right?"

Mr. Biggamore shook his head. "Pinchin? Pinchin?" he repeated, slowly twisting his forelock until it stood out from his head like a pigtail. "Don't seem to recall the name, somehow. But I 've no head for names, anyway. No — don't seem to remember it."

Corrie looked around the garden, affecting to gaze at the massed display of color with a detached and purely casual interest. "Are n't your flowers beautiful! But Mrs. Pinchin — perhaps she lived here before you, Mr. Biggamore. Will you tell me how long you 've had the house?"

He looked up at the sky thoughtfully. "Let me

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see — how long? Hm—m—mh! I 'll have to figure. No head for names, but pretty good at arithmetic." Mr. Biggamore took a fresh clutch at his forelock and calculated mentally. " Been here? — why, fourteen years, two months, and a few days — five or six, I should say. Is that close enough? "

An exclamation sprang to Corrie's lips, but she managed to repress it. Fourteen years? It had been just that long ago when Mrs. Pinchin made her night's flitting from the house. " Ah, yes; so I thought," she assented, still with the same studious unconcern. " The lady I was looking for moved from here about that time. But then, of course," she added, smiling politely, " if you don't remember her, there 's no need of my bothering you about it." Smiling again, she made a movement as if to rise in departure, though she had no intention, yet, of giving up so easily. She was too certain she had found the house, for one reason.

Mr. Biggamore dropped his hand long enough from his stray lock to wring his nose dubiously. " Must be a mistake somewhere," he said musingly. " This house belonged to an estate, you see. Pinchin? Pinchin? " he echoed to himself, and again shook his head. " Still don't seem to recall that name," he repeated, looking a little troubled. " Begins to sound a little familiar, too, now that I think it over. However, I 'm sure the house never belonged to your friend. Must be some other house like this. The estate built three or four just alike."

Corrie arose to her feet, a smile on her face, but

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in her heart nothing akin either to a smile or any other trait of cheerfulness. "I'm very grateful to you for your kindness, Mr. Biggamore," she said pleasantly, but somehow, despite her trying, her lip trembled a little; "thank you for giving me so much of your time."

He peered at her quickly. "But perhaps there's some way I could aid you?" he suggested courteously; "do I understand you are sure about the house, or," he inquired hesitatingly, "or — why — is it just the description you have? If that's the case, I know this neighborhood from *a* to *z*, my young lady, — and besides," he added brightly, and grinned; "why — hm-m-mh! — why, we make houses right here on the premises — yes, we do!" and with a laugh explained himself. "My young nephew is an architect — a pretty good one, too, though I say it myself that perhaps should n't. Oh, yes! — lots of houses upstairs. All drawn out on paper. Now if you'll tell me what *your* house looks like?"

Corrie told him, making a wry little mouth over the parrot-like repetition, the glibly-repeated detail of green blinds, white pillars, fan light, and spindle railing. And at the description Mr. Biggamore cocked up his ear alertly, and resumed his tugging at his forelock.

"Why! sure enough; that's this very house of mine. You've got it down to a dot!" he cried, nodding with interest. "And by the same token, too," he added energetically, "it fits to a dot all the other houses I spoke about — the ones built by that estate,

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I mean. Why, there 's one right around the corner — Right there!" he cried and pointed with a wave of his hand to the house behind them.

But the instant the words left him he glanced suddenly at Corrie, with a look of nervously awakened interest that seemed almost pointed. "Pinchin? Pinchin?" he echoed once more, and then let his eyes travel slowly toward the house he had pointed out; "are you sure the name was Pinchin?"

Quite sure; Corrie repeated it, and even went to the trouble of slowly spelling it. "It 's rather important, you see, Mr. Biggamore, that I find out about her. Otherwise I would n't have troubled you. She and my family were acquainted."

Mr. Biggamore appeared not to be listening to her. "No," he said dully, as if musing aloud; "I don't think she lived in that house, either. I think not; but it might be worth trying to find out."

Corrie looked up over the tangle of wistaria toward the windowed rear wall behind them. "Who lives there now?" she asked incuriously, and really without interest now, since she had about made up her mind nothing was to be learned by questioning him any more. Corrie was little prepared for the consequence of that idle question, idly asked.

"In *that* house, ma'am! *Hmph!*" Mr. Biggamore shot a vehement look at her, and a still more vehement look at the house. Both hands were thrust behind him, and he angrily tossed his coat-tails. "A perfect stranger, ma'am. . . . A *perfect stranger!* Do I make myself clear to you?" Staring at her

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fixedly, he wrinkled up his brow into a scowl, dragged out his handkerchief, and wrung an indignant trumpet blast from his nose. "An entire stranger to me, ma'am!" he repeated indignantly.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Corrie, and Mr. Biggamore looked at her uncomfortably.

"No fault of yours, my dear young lady. Man's a perfect stranger, I assure you. No call for an apology — not in the least!"

Still snorting under his breath, Mr. Biggamore led the astonished girl back through the French windows, the dining room, and the hall, and gravely bowed her out. It was a curious scene, a queer ending to so much geniality and quaint, old-mannered kindness; and a regretful ending, too. But as Corrie looked back from the sidewalk, Mr. Biggamore suddenly recovered his amiability, and bobbed to her energetically. "If you can't find your house," he chirped pleasantly, "come back and let me know. Maybe I may recall where I've heard the name — Pinchin? — was n't that it?"

Corrie thanked him smilingly, and then the door closed behind her.

Which way now? Must it be back to Mrs. Pinchin's, once more bearing the flag of defeat? Dully hopeless, she walked away from the scene of disappointment and failure, and the sting of it would have been unbearable, had she not always felt that hopelessness. No, she would never find out — never lay her hand on any hint of her identity! It seemed not even worth the while to walk around the corner —

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not worth the waste of time to look at that other house, the one behind Mr. Biggamore's. The house there meant only another disappointment — and why add another pang? But the uncertainty!

Quickening her steps, the girl turned the corner and entered the street beyond.

It was another quiet byway, just such a street as the one she just had quit. It, too, seemed familiar — curiously enough, even more familiar. Hurriedly she crossed over to the opposite curb and looked up at the lamp post. "Bend Street," she read, and repeated it: "Bend Street — Bend — Bend!" Then like a searching flash of light, the name touched back upon some cell of recollection, and flooded every nook and cranny of her mind. *Bend Street!* Corrie *knew* that name! It returned to her, shouting in the dimmed recesses of her brain, its remembrance cried up to her from the forgotten depths of the past. Swiftly, she walked along. Bend Street! — even the number now — No. 66 Bend Street — the right house on the right side of the way! No mistake now! There it was — green blinds, pillars, fan light, spindle railing and all — all as she had expected to find them. She halted, staring up at it agape, and was just ready to march up and ring its bell, when, all at once, a sharp cry escaped her, and she shrank back in blank dismay.

For coming down the steps of No. 66 Bend Street was a woman, her stick thwacking loudly on the pavement, and the woman was Mrs. Pinchin herself!

CHAPTER VII

Showing how any kind of conscience, even though pure, may make cowards of the best of us. — Corrie's interrupted flight. — Her return to Mr. Biggamore's and the uncomfortable result of it. — The mystery of the back-door neighbor. — Mr. Biggamore's sister and her suspicions against her caller. — The question about the boy with the bread and jam. — Mrs. Pinchin's identity and the rebuff courteous. — Corrie's hurt dismay. — Enter Philip Geikie, astonished.

FLIGHT was Corrie's first impulse. She saw that massive figure limping down the steps, the eyes staring straight ahead, and the jaw and heavy face set rigidly. Whether Mrs. Pinchin had seen her remained a question; but when the girl turned the corner with a flying look backward, Mrs. Pinchin had gone the other way, and with the best speed possible, her stick sounding smartly on the pavement, was making off into the distance. Whither she was bound was also a question, though Corrie had no thought of that now, but rather, why Mrs. Pinchin had not instantly pursued her. Had she escaped after all? The thing to do now was to get home, and to get home as quickly as possible. So, after another glance at the retreating figure, Corrie set out on the way as fast as her feet could carry her.

But what did it mean? What brought Mrs. Pinchin back to the scene of former days? Who lived in that house now, and why had she gone there? Still

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dazed, dismayed, overwrought by the mystery, Corrie hazarded guess after guess, not one of which, when momentarily considered, seemed to be in the least way plausible. But that Mrs. Pinchin's early morning activity bore a vital part in the growing mystery, Corrie felt certain beyond the smallest shadow of a doubt. And there were these other doings, too, — the conflict with Maria, Mrs. Pinchin's departure in the carriage, and the bundle she took with her. What, for instance, was in the bundle, and why had Mrs. Pinchin so burdened herself when there was Corrie who was always called on to fetch and carry? She shook her head, her wits a hopeless tangle.

But as Corrie hurried back toward Eighth Street and the Elevated, a sudden thought struck her. Why wait to clear up the tangle? Why delay? For when would she get another chance as good? Mrs. Pinchin was not one to overlook another's misdeeds; much less would she overlook so outrageous a fault as disobedience to her orders; and had not Corrie wilfully disobeyed in slipping out of the house? Or what, too, if Mrs. Pinchin had seen Corrie prowling the streets in her wake? If she had, many days might pass before Corrie could prowl again — many days before a chance might come to find who lived in that house. No — if anything were to be done, it must be done now; nothing was to be gained by delay. Armed with her resolution, she turned on her heel, and swiftly retraced her steps to Bend Street.

Mrs. Pinchin had disappeared; the street lay quiet

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and solitary. Beyond, the missing mansion raised its front, now found and more fully fledged than ever in its bewildering garb of mystery. From the corner she could see it clearly, its closed door blankly secretive, its windows with their shades closely drawn, its discreet and impressive quiet, as if within skulked the untold and the unknown. Or so Corrie thought, after a momentary look; and rounding the corner again, she returned to Mr. Biggamore's. He must tell her who lived in that house, for she dared not ask at the house itself, and that he knew she was certain.

Her emotions, when she drew near Mr. Biggamore's, were even more confused than before. Wonder, dismay, even a little shadowy sense of fear oppressed her; for to what troubles, even perils, would the next move commit her? She knew definitely, though with no clear grasp of the facts, that the threads of this tangled skein stretched all about her — from Mrs. Pinchin herself, back through the strange mansion in the adjoining street, and from there further onward, here to this queer little gentleman mured in his quaint retreat. But nothing ventured, nothing won! Summoning all her courage, she laid her hand to the bell hanger and rang vigorously.

The door opened almost instantly, the servant holding it back to let out a young girl of about Corrie's own age. "And say I'll be back later, won't you," she was saying to the servant. "You can tell Higgs when he comes to drive to my aunt's." "Yes, Miss Virgie," answered the elderly servant; and the

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girl seeing Corrie coming up the steps, glanced at her, and smiling pleasantly, went on her way down the street.

A very pretty girl, thought Corrie, and trim and smart in her quiet street dress. Very attractive, too, with her frank smile. Corrie looked back from her to the servant. "Will you ask Mr. Biggamore whether I may see him again?" she inquired; and this time, as if assured the early morning visitor had no ulterior designs on the house, the servant showed her courteously into the drawing-room. There she found a seat on an old-rose-colored damask sofa under the portrait of a youthful Mr. Biggamore, and presently he appeared in person.

To say that Mr. Biggamore was astonished but indefinitely expresses it. "Why, my dear young lady!" he ejaculated. "Not back again so soon!" he piped, and could hardly restrain his curiosity. "Well! well! and what is it now?"

Corrie looked at him perplexedly, hardly knowing how to go at it. It was clear to her, after once having seen his emotion over the matter, that he knew perfectly who lived in the house behind. And what would happen when she deliberately plied him with the question. "Mr. Biggamore," she said hesitantly, "I have found the house, and this time there can be no mistake. It is the one you pointed out to me; your neighbor, just back of us!"

Instantly the inquiry in his face transformed into open astonishment. "That house!" he exclaimed, as if he were unable to believe he had heard her

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aright. "You say that is the one? Hm-m-mh!" Mr. Biggamore pursed up his lips and frowned thoughtfully. "How long ago did this Mrs. — this Mrs. — Ah, yes! thank you! When did this Mrs. Pinchin live there?"

She reminded him it had been fourteen years before. "There can be no mistake, I assure you," she added convincingly. "I am quite certain about it."

Mr. Biggamore pressed his lips together again, and with a hand on each of his knees, leaned forward intently. His manner now had lost all its first genial, eager kindness; he had become suddenly alert and cautious, careful, shrewd — almost hard. "One thing or the other, my dear young lady," he said concisely, after deliberation; "you are either very sadly in error, or you know something which I, too, would like to know." He edged forward in his chair, eyeing her closely. "Tell me," he demanded abruptly, "who is this Mrs. Pinchot — Pinchot? no, that is n't it — I mean, who 's this Mrs. Pinchin? — and what about her?"

Corrie, thoroughly alarmed and on guard now at the quick change in his manner, felt her heart flutter nervously. "Why — why, who is Mrs. Pinchin, you ask?" she stammered, echoing his words in the effort to gain time enough to compose herself. "Why, Mrs. Pinchin is — she 's — —"

She came to an awkward pause. Yes! who, indeed, was Mrs. Pinchin? For Corrie did n't know, now that she came to think of it. And not knowing, how

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could she explain herself to her inquisitor, now grown alert, his eyes fixed on her in significant doubt?

“My dear young lady,” protested Mr. Biggamore, after a painful interval, “it strikes me, if I may say so, that this is a rather queer proceeding.” He moved nervously in his seat again, and pursed out his lips. “You come here to my home, an utter stranger to me, and you ask me to tell you what I know about the man who lives in the house behind us.” He cleared his throat noisily at this, and peered at her. “Now while I dislike to offend you by an unjust suspicion, my young lady, you must admit the circumstances to be little in your favor. Particularly so,” he added very gently and politely, “when your only explanation is that you are hunting for a woman you do not seem to know—or so it looks. Now will you tell me what it really is you’re trying to find out?”

Corrie caught at her breath; it was as he said. Here she was, a young woman, very young indeed, a girl hardly more than a child, blindly struggling with vital matters far beyond her grasp. “But oh, oh, why now——” stammered Corrie, confusedly, and then bit her lip. “Mr. Biggamore,” she said frankly, and so far upset that she made no effort to hide her embarrassment and trouble, “I can’t tell you who Mrs. Pinchin is because—why, because I don’t know. I never did know,” she added baldly as she gazed at him, her eyes deep with appeal; “and now I’m really trying to find out. But she lived in that house, Mr. Biggamore; I know that because I lived there with her!”

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In the pause following this astonishing admission, a pause more than filled, on one hand, by the girl's growing excitement, on the other hand, by Mr. Biggamore's open-mouthed wonder, a footfall sounded on the stair. It came down the flight with a stately slowness, halted a moment at the doorway, and then a softly modulated voice called out quietly:—“Philip, are you here?”

Mr. Biggamore sprang to his feet. “A moment, if you please,” he murmured apologetically; and as he pushed aside the hangings at the door, Corrie saw in the hallway a tall, slenderly built woman, white haired and grave, whose face was sweet with its air of placid repose. “A young lady to see me,” Corrie heard Mr. Biggamore hurriedly explain, with a small confusion; “I want you to come in and speak to her.”

“A young lady? Why, yes indeed, Philip,” said the quiet voice pleasantly, and Corrie rose to her feet.

“This is Miss — er, why Miss —” began Mr. Biggamore and then halted in confusion. “Bless me, if I haven’t gone and forgotten the name again!”

“I’m Miss Robinson,” Corrie murmured shyly, herself a little confused, and, beside that, still filled with her emotion of the moment before. Though Mr. Biggamore’s surprising forgetfulness of names had broken off the introduction, she guessed the elderly woman’s relation to the little man in a certain resemblance that was unmistakable. “I’m afraid I must

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have been troubling your brother a great deal," she ventured. "I hope I have n't kept him from you."

"Nonsense! not troubling me in the least!" exclaimed Mr. Biggamore, but whether sincerely or not was a question; that is, if one considered how he tugged at his forelock and trod from one foot to the other. "Delighted, I 'm sure. Highly interested, besides!"

The white-haired woman looked around inquiringly. "Interested? why, that 's very good, I am sure. My brother is usually so engrossed in his flowers, Miss Robinson, that it is hard to get him away from them. What is it about, may I know?" she asked, smiling pleasantly. Drawing the folds of her soft, clinging, gray house dress about her, she sat down beside Corrie on the sofa, and bent toward her encouragingly, as if to overcome what was naturally a young girl's shyness.

Corrie's eyes dropped uncomfortably. So far from setting her at her ease, the gentle lady at her side had only succeeded in forcing on her an added knowledge of how awkward the situation had become. For, if it had seemed difficult to explain herself to Mr. Biggamore, how could she blurt it out now to this quiet, self-repressed, grave, gray-haired woman beside her? But before the uncomfortable pause had become too significant, Mr. Biggamore spoke.

"My dear Laura," said he, peering over his spectacles at his sister, "our young friend here has come to me with a question that seems to be a very earnest

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matter to her. I have n't been able to answer it, but perhaps you can. The fact is, do you know a Mrs. Pinchin?" He turned inquiringly to Corrie. "That is the name, as I recall it? Thank you! Laura, have you ever heard of this Mrs. Pinchin?"

"*Pinchin?*" Mr. Biggamore's sister uttered the name with just the faintest note of recognition. "Pinchin? — where have I heard it now? Why! — just a moment — Pinchin? — Pinchin?" Then her eyes lighted. "Oh, yes! Mrs. Pinchin; why, of course! I remember the name."

Corrie impulsively bent toward her. "*There!* I was sure of it!" she cried, her face lighted with animation. "Now won't you let me tell you what I want to know. It's this!" she exclaimed, growing still more eager. "Mrs. Pinchin lived in this house behind us. Then there was a boy who lived here — here in your house — a boy with brown hair and a snub nose. Why!" exclaimed Corrie, in growing excitement, "why! it must have been your son! It must have been, Mr. Biggamore!"

At the excited words and aware of the girl's growing agitation, Mr. Biggamore and his sister looked at each other blankly. "My son! my boy!" exclaimed Mr. Biggamore, in obvious stupefaction; "I have no son. What are you saying? I have no boy; never had any. Nor chick nor child of any kind!"

His sister was the first to gain composure. "One moment, Philip," she begged the astounded Mr. Biggamore; "I believe I know whom Miss Robinson has in mind. But before this goes any further, I should

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like to be enlightened. What is this all about?" With quiet dignity she bent her eyes on Corrie. "This boy you speak about — what do you wish to know about him? And why do you wish to know?"

Corrie's voice trembled uncertainly when she answered. "He knew something I wish to learn. I talked to him through the fence back there. I was living in that house."

For a brief moment Mr. Biggamore and his sister exchanged another glance. "Ah! And you say Mrs. Pinchin lived there, too?" the elderly woman persisted; and when Corrie bent her head in silent assent, Mr. Biggamore's sister pressed her lips tightly together, her manner even graver than before. "Philip, Miss Robinson seems very confident. What do you think of it?"

"Think of it!" exploded Mr. Biggamore, who during the moment had been teetering to and fro, his hands thrust behind him furiously tossing his coat-tails. "Think of it! I don't know what to think at all. In the first place, who in the world is this Mrs. Pinchin? You seem to know her, Laura! Who is she, I say?"

There was a pointed meaning in her tone when she spoke. "If you'll try to think, Philip, you will recall her, too."

"Think? how can I think?" Mr. Biggamore protested hotly. "Never heard of her in my life! Come, stop this. Who is she?"

"The boy's new acquaintance," she answered, and in the crisp directness of her words, there was every

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quality of dramatic intensity. "It is she, without a doubt. But what her motive is, who can say?"

Mr. Biggamore plumped down into the nearest chair, and leaning toward his sister, opened his mouth and eyes until they had made of him the living personation of an exclamation point. "Her!" he cried, expressively, if inelegantly. "Her! — why! — oh, well I *never!*"

Poor Corrie! Filled with a new alarm, she felt her heart beat thickly in her breast. Who were these persons on whom she had stumbled so blindly, and why their wonder at the possible, if not probable, identity of Mrs. Pinchin? That they knew her now, or, at least, knew something about some Mrs. Pinchin, was clearly obvious — painfully so, in fact. But out of the hopeless tangle, she could draw nothing definite — nothing, unless it were an added, creeping trepidation.

"What is it you wish to know from my boy?" inquired Mr. Biggamore's sister, quietly, but with a disturbing reserve in her tone and manner.

Corrie moistened her dry lips. "It was n't really the boy," she answered, choosing her words slowly with the knowledge that caution was required now. "It was his father. The boy said his father knew something, and now I am trying to find it out. If I could see his father! May I see him? He would tell me, I think. Can't you or Mr. Biggamore take me to him?"

Very quietly and simply the grave-faced woman answered the girl's plea. She folded her hands in her

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lap and a shadow drew across her face; her lips trembled momentarily with some hidden pain. "He was my boy's father, Miss Robinson. He died many years ago, just after we moved into this house."

The silence grew. Mr. Biggamore sat staring at the carpet; and outside in the hall the tall clock ticked with a heavy, measured tread — a slow, thick, deliberate tick! tock! — tick! tock! — the footfalls of passing time. Beside the girl Mr. Biggamore's sister leaned back with a far-away thoughtfulness in her eyes, gazing pensively through the half-drawn curtains of the window; and even Corrie knew from the look how unforgotten and painful the sorrow must be whose wraith she had so ruthlessly, though innocently, dragged up out of the past.

"*Oh!*" she whispered contritely, and at the murmur the two others stirred slowly.

"Laura," said Mr. Biggamore, slowly deliberate, but with all the former significance in his tone, "Laura, this is a strange affair. Very, very strange, I should say. Can this young lady be right? Somehow, I can't quite convince myself, but I think we ought to make sure about that woman ever living there. Don't you think so, too?"

"Yes," she answered absently; "I think we ought to make sure."

He paced across the room and back again. "Will you describe this Mrs. Pinchin?" he asked; and once more Corrie heard his first quiet tone of encouragement; "I should like to hear what she looks like."

Corrie described her. Detail by detail, as closely

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as she could, she drew the figure of Mrs. Pinchin: Mrs. Pinchin's massive form, her dark, leathery face, its square jaw and drooping mouth; Mrs. Pinchin's thick-lidded, peering eyes, deep and languorously dull; her limp, her stick, her deliberate gait — Mrs. Pinchin to the life. None could have mistaken the likeness; the stalwart, heavy, square-framed, ponderous, deliberate woman, her profound, suspicious manner, her grim and resolute way. None could have mistaken it for any other woman had the listener ever laid eyes on Mrs. Pinchin. The two hearkening intently, looked at each other and blankly shook their heads.

"Phil," said Mr. Biggamore's sister, "this is queer. That woman never lived in the house behind us, I am very sure; or not while we have been living here. But the description is a very close description of Phil's Mrs. Pinchin, there can be no mistake of that. But that she lived *there!* *Incredible!* or —" Mr. Biggamore's sister caught her breath, and stopped. "Or —"

The brother, too, seemed to share her thought, whatever it may have been — the apparent suspicion that had so abruptly silenced the gray-haired woman. But *Phil's Mrs. Pinchin!* Who was she? It was on the end of Corrie's tongue to ask impulsively, when once again Mr. Biggamore cut in. "Now look here!" he exclaimed, or, rather, once more exploded; "you lived in that house and you say she lived in that house? Are you dead certain?"

Corrie nodded rather drearily, wondering in dismay what kind of a hornet's nest she had really

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stirred up around her. Mr. Biggamore got up and stood in front of her. "Very well then! And now, my dear young girl, will you please tell me *why* you are sure? Give me one good reason — just one. I'll own up it's a pretty important matter to me to find out. Now, why are you so sure?"

"Because," answered Corrie, raising her face; "because I lived there with her. Because I know the house and remember it. I remember the number, too. No, I'm sure, Mr. Biggamore, and besides — why, not half an hour ago I saw Mrs. Pinchin herself come out of that very house!"

If Corrie had tried deliberately to arrange and stage a dramatic climax, it could have possessed no greater emotion, nor been any more intense than the result of this unpremeditated shot. Mrs. Pinchin seen coming out of that house? The words appeared to fall on the two like a bolt out of a clear sky. Mr. Biggamore gasped, and the sister, for a moment forgetting her calm and dignified reserve, suffered an exclamation to escape her.

"Then, Philip," said Mr. Biggamore's sister, "this explains that woman's strange interest in the boy; or rather, it gives us an inkling. But what is she trying to do? What is her motive?"

With the words still on her lips, she turned instantly to Corrie, a sudden, pointed suspicion in her manner. "Miss Robinson, there is a Mrs. Pinchin living in West Seventy-fifth Street near the Park. Do you happen to know her?"

In West Seventy-fifth Street! It was Corrie's own

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Mrs. Pinchin, of course! There was no doubt of that! But in her embarrassment at being asked so pointedly and suspiciously, Corrie forgot astonishment that they had guessed who it was. "Yes, I know her; she is the one," she answered dully, unaware, too, of what the admission must have signified to them.

Again the gray-haired woman caught her breath. "You know her? And you say she is the one you are hunting? Miss Robinson, what is your relation to this Mrs. Pinchin, may I inquire?"

Corrie answered, feeling it was no use to hold back the truth; they could find out anyway, if they chose. "I live with her — I am her companion!"

"Ah, indeed!" The murmured comment was filled with every significance of what Mr. Biggamore's sister had decided this young woman to be; but Corrie blundered on, her mind in no condition to take it in. She even overlooked the fact that the other had risen and was now standing with folded hands, manifestly no longer willing to prolong the uncomfortable interview. "Yes," said Corrie, "I've lived with her always. I lived in the house behind you, too. Won't you tell me who lives there now?"

It was the covert shake of Mr. Biggamore's head that awoke the girl to a full sense of her position — a furtive signal wigwagging caution. But Mr. Biggamore's sister required no warning.

"Miss Robinson," she said courteously, yet with an icy decisiveness that left Corrie no longer in ignorance, "you will pardon me, but let me recall to you the fact that Mrs. Pinchin is already supplied

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with the information you come for. Philip, will you open the door for Miss Robinson?"

"Why — oh!" That was all. There was nothing to say, though Corrie made a stammering effort to explain herself. But as she started toward the door, confused and wounded, flushing with the shame of her false position, a key was thrust into the lock, the door opened, and a voice cried out cheerfully, "Oh, mother! Hello, uncle! Anyone at home?"

Corrie stood rooted to the carpet. A young man appeared at the door, and when his eye fell on Corrie he flashed at her a moment's dumbfounded look of wonder, and then burst into a peal of laughter.

"Oh, Miss Robinson! Oh, what a joke!" he cried cordially, and not in the least embarrassed. "So the ogres have really got you?"

It was Phil Geikie, of course — young Mr. Geikie who had craftily directed Corrie to his own home in her search for the missing mansion. Plainly speaking, he had done so for several reasons; the chief one of which was that he might return and find her there; another, that he wished to hear from his mother just what she thought of this curious Mrs. Pinchin's highly interesting paid companion. But Corrie, too hurt to realize and knowing only what it had cost her, hung her head and tried to get by him to the door.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, and then he stared at his mother and uncle. One look was enough. He turned to Corrie in dismay. "Why, what has happened?"

CHAPTER VIII

In which our young hero is led to regret his unusual method of presenting Corrie to his family. — His effort to pour oil on troubled waters. — Corrie's departure under a cloud, and the young man's ready sympathy. — Stanwood Geikie, the family's evil genius, and the tale of how money may be cast away with good effect. — The Tollabees placed; but no accounting for Mrs. Pinchin. — Stanwood Geikie's deserted wife. — Corrie tells part of her story. — One advantage from looking dowdy.

“WHY!” exclaimed Phil Geikie, confusedly, “is there anything wrong?”

A great deal appeared to be wrong. His mother, her head thrown back proudly, stood looking at him in haughty disapproval as she realized that this young woman and her son seemed to know each other rather well; and his uncle, energetically twitching his stray wisp of hair, uncomfortably averted his eyes. Corrie, even more uncomfortable than the others, gazed at Phil as if yet unable to grasp the explanation of his sudden appearance on the scene; for his entrance, coming as it did as a climax to her other bewilderments, served to put a finishing touch on the chaos in her mind. Forgetting it was the boy himself who had playfully sent her to his own home, she thought only of the consequences. And now that he had found her there, what was to happen? Was Mrs. Pinchin to learn through this channel also some

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further history of how her companion had occupied this rather extraordinary morning?

“You know Miss Robinson, I see?” said Mrs. Geikie, slowly, and with an inflection that gave to the question a pointed force.

“Know her? Why, of course I do!” answered Phil, heartily. “Don’t you remember my telling you how I’ve talked to her? It was she, mother, whom I met at Mrs. Pinchin’s.”

Mrs. Geikie still regarded him with an unchanged expression. “Precisely! You talked to the people in that house, though you could n’t realize why they took such an interest in your affairs.” Phil caught her note of resentment and stirred uneasily.

“Could n’t realize? Mother, I don’t think I quite understand you.”

Mrs. Geikie faintly smiled. “I mean this, Phil: Miss Robinson came here this morning to ask whether we knew of the Mrs. Pinchin, whom, I now find, she is living with. Rather singular, was n’t it? Naturally we could tell her nothing she does not already know; though I am afraid Miss Robinson is not satisfied. In fact, I have had to tell her there are personal reasons why we should n’t answer her many questions. I trust you have been as cautious.”

“Mother!” exclaimed Phil, in remonstrance, but before he could speak again, Corrie found her voice.

“Personal reasons, Mrs. Geikie!” she cried, astonished. “Why, I had no idea of asking you anything like that. There must be some mistake.”

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“Yes, mother, I hardly think Miss Robinson could do that. How do you mean?”

“Precisely what I say,” answered his mother, coldly. “Miss Robinson insists on our telling her what we know of the person living in that house behind us. She says further she has seen Mrs. Pinchin coming out of it. And, as you are aware, I know only one thing about the man who lives there — something that for years I have tried painfully to forget.”

But Corrie, alive to what their suspicion conveyed, stood ready to plead her cause. “Oh, Mrs. Geikie, I can’t let you misunderstand me so!” she protested. “And you, Mr. Biggamore!” she cried, turning to him, “I never dreamed of offending you like that! I knew nothing about the people living in that house, and even now I don’t understand how anything I have said should make such trouble!”

Her earnestness carried conviction with it, and even Mr. Biggamore and his sister seemed a little less certain in their suspicion.

“Laura,” said the little gentleman, “perhaps we have done Miss Robinson an injustice. I think we ought to tell her what we know, for no matter what might be said about it, we have nothing after all to conceal. Perhaps we may get some light on the matter, too, for I frankly confess it’s far beyond me.”

Mrs. Geikie, looking at Corrie quietly, pondered the question. “If you mean there is nothing for us to hide, Philip, I agree with you. But Philip,” she

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added definitely, "I am still to be convinced that we should discuss this matter with anyone — least of all, when the person is a stranger who has not given to us a very clear idea of what she is trying to find out." She looked meaningfully at Corrie. "I think even Miss Robinson must assent to that."

"Mother!" cried Phil, again.

But Mrs. Geikie gave no heed she had heard him. "Perhaps Miss Robinson will tell us her motive for wishing to know?"

Yes, why Corrie wished to know! It seemed reasonable enough, and, of course, there were many decided reasons why Corrie wished to know. But to tell them her motives and all about this matter of Corrie *who* and Corrie *what*, argued a frankness that could hardly be expected of her. It might do well enough to admit to herself she knew nothing of her own name and parentage, but to confess it to them — and particularly to this young and attractive boy — well, that was rather different! The thought of it was enough to send the color into her cheeks, and she dropped her eyes in embarrassment.

"I don't think I can tell you, Mrs. Geikie," she answered slowly. "I have a reason, but it's not the one you think. I hope you will pardon me for making you so much trouble."

But, as she moved toward the door, Phil Geikie tried quietly to relieve the situation. "Mother," said he, though his eyes were on Corrie, "you mustn't let Miss Robinson go like this. I don't wonder she does n't care to say anything when we

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have been so rude to her. Won't you try to straighten it out?"

Corrie shook her head at him. "No, Mr. Geikie, there is n't anything to be said now. I realize how it must look to your mother, and she is quite right, I think. It *is* queer, but I can't help myself, and I have no right to bother her any more."

Then fearful lest they see the tears brimming in her eyes, Corrie bent her head and hurriedly left the room, her only wish to get away from the uncomfortable predicament.

But, as the girl stumbled blindly down the little flight of steps to the street, she was aware that he had come with her, and was now looking down at her, concerned for her trouble. "Please don't feel so badly about it," he begged presently. "I don't think mother realized how much it meant to you. Miss Robinson," he added hesitatingly, as if fearful of intruding himself, "is n't there some way I can help you? I have n't realized before this was so serious a matter with you. If I could do anything, or," he went on, still more earnestly, "if there were some way you could let mother get at it, I'm sure she'd be only too willing to aid you all she could. She's upset now. I don't think you know why, but I assure you she has every reason to be. Why!" he exclaimed energetically, "you don't realize who the man is that lives in the house behind us! I'll tell you if you like."

At his earnestness Corrie forgot, for a moment, her own concern. But with the instant's desire to

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hear what he had to tell came the fear that her longing to know might be construed only as vulgar curiosity. "No, I think it would be better if you did n't tell me," she cautioned dully; "it probably would n't mean anything to me, anyway."

But he gave no heed to the caution. "Perhaps it would, though, and at all events there is really nothing to conceal. The man is my uncle, Stanwood Geikie."

"Oh!" murmured Corrie, and echoed the name. "Your uncle, and yet you have n't known that he was acquainted with Mrs. Pinchin?"

But Stanwood Geikie! Who was he? and what was his connection with the Pinchin matter? Of course, the fact that the man was Philip Geikie's uncle might in a way explain the curious behavior of Mr. Biggamore and his sister; but beyond that, the knowledge of their relationship with him served only to throw her mind into a still greater confusion. For what was the explanation of Mrs. Pinchin's connection with this Stanwood Geikie? Why had she gone to his house that morning? and what had taken her there? Was her relation merely one between landlord and tenant? Was the house still hers? and Mrs. Pinchin a visitor only to inspect her property? Furthermore, what was the antagonism between the man and his relatives — Mr. Biggamore, his sister, and nephew?

Corrie was still battling with her perplexities when he spoke again. "Do you wonder now why my mother and uncle were so suspicious?" he inquired. "You

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see, the truth is, they had already begun to imagine something queer in Mrs. Pinchin's interest in me. The fact that you had seen Mrs. Pinchin coming out of his house turned their suspicions into certainty, and they were ready then to suspect anyone. I hardly need tell you they have every reason to dread him; you must have seen that from their manner."

"But I thought you were only Mrs. Pinchin's architect!" cried Corrie, all at sea. "Aren't you only rebuilding some of her houses?"

He smiled at her perplexity. "That's the queerest part about it," he replied; "we were all in the dark why she came to me with that work until you turned on the light." Then he laughed, and wrinkled up his face ruefully. "I suppose you'd like to know why? Well, in the first place, Mrs. Pinchin is one of the very first clients who came to me. Not because I hadn't tried to get others," chuckled young Mr. Geikie, making another face over it; "oh, no, indeed! But to make it clear to you, Mrs. Pinchin virtually dropped in on me out of a blue sky; particularly blue, it must have been, too, judging by the way I felt. You see, I'd just started in. At all events, I got a note asking me to call on her. Mind, now, I'd never heard of her before! and when I went up to her house, she handed me out this commission. Of course," he added with a laughing good humor, "with my own sublime knowledge of my abilities and my certain fame and that, clients were to be expected. Oh, yes! and that's what Uncle Phil had kept on telling me when I got too much in

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the blues. Why, good heavens!" here he chuckled again, "to hear Uncle Phil go on you'd think I was a Viollet-le-Duc or a Christopher Wren. But anyway, Mrs. Pinchin engaged me, and since then I've lain awake nights trying to figure out where she ever heard of me, or why she ever trusted her precious houses into the hands of an architect who was about as well known to her as — well, say John Smith in the directory!"

"Yes, it was queer, was n't it?" assented Corrie, with such unaffected frankness that he glanced at her ruefully. "I don't wonder you thought so!"

"Thanks, Miss Robinson! Very nice of you to say it," he retorted with a grin, and Corrie blushed rosily. "But, never mind; it did seem queer, and I told my uncle I thought so, too."

"And what did he say?"

"He? Oh, he just said 'Pooh!' He had it all figured out that talent like mine could n't remain hidden under a bushel, and that news of my coming had already leaked out to an expectant world. But mother was n't so ready to deceive herself. She thought I was the boy wonder, of course, but still she tried to find out something from her friends about this Mrs. Pinchin."

"Did anyone know her?" asked Corrie, quickly.

"No. No one knew Mrs. Pinchin, it appeared. But that is n't strange," he exclaimed clearly. "Mother's friends are the kind that have never known anyone else but themselves since they came over in the Ark. I don't believe they're acquainted

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with a soul above Fifty-ninth Street, and mighty few, besides, above Murray Hill, — that is, if you except a few strays that have been driven northward out of their ancestral homes by someone putting up a factory next door, or an office building that cut off all the light. You know how the Avenue's been changed around the last few years. Why," he laughed, "one of mother's friends was complaining the other day that all the lower part had been turned into a sweatshop now, and that her front steps had become a noonday luncheon counter. You know how they pour out of those big buildings at noon? Well, mother advised her friend to move. 'Move!' she screamed, 'like some vulgar millionaire with a house up around the Park? I'll have you to understand that the Duyckirks move only once in their lives, and that's to Greenwood Cemetery!' But to get back to Mrs. Pinchin. No one seemed to know anything about her."

"Yes," Corrie assented, "no one seems to know at all. I wish I knew myself."

"You know nothing about her?" he echoed, as if not quite understanding what she meant. "How was it then, may I ask, that you went to live with her?"

If the young man had stopped to think a moment, he might not have asked so impertinent a question — a question that, if answered frankly, might have given Corrie no little embarrassment to answer. "I've lived with her a long while," she replied evasively; "but I know only that she calls herself Mrs. Pinchin. I don't know much else about her, though."

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To have disclosed more would have been also to disclose the fact that she had gone to Mrs. Pinchin as a child, an admission that in itself would have required still further explanations; and Corrie was still determined to hide from him the fact that she had been adopted, that she knew nothing of her parentage, that her origin was to her an unsolved riddle. The result was that he jumped at an entirely different conclusion.

"Oh, I see how it is now!" he cried animatedly. Why, of course! how stupid of me! You're trying to find out who she is, so that you'll know whether it's proper for you to live with her. Now, why didn't you say so to mother?"

Corrie understood him instantly. "No," she answered, unwilling to deceive him openly, though the explanation would prove embarrassing, "that was n't it altogether. It means more than finding out about Mrs. Pinchin. It meant finding out about myself as well — something I can't talk to you about," she admitted unguardedly.

His look of quick astonishment warned her she was going too far now, and she paused, looking up at him. "Mr Geikie," she said, and involuntarily laid a hand on the young man's arm, "you can trust me, can't you? I want you and your mother to know I had a real reason for going to your house to-day. It is something of a good deal of importance to me. You'll believe that, and trust me, won't you?"

"Yes, indeed I will!" he answered sincerely. "You don't need to ask that of me," he added; and

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as they went on through the quiet, deserted street, she felt his hand clasp hers with a gentle, reassuring pressure. "Can't you see that I do?"

She let her hand remain in his for a moment, and then quietly disengaged it, her eyes softly grateful. He was the first to speak then. "Some day," he ventured smilingly, "you must tell what it is that troubles you. I won't ask it now. But, in the meanwhile, maybe I can do something to help you. Is there anything I can tell you — about that man, for instance — my uncle Stanwood?"

There was much that he might tell her, but with that new understanding between them, the sympathy he had shown in that gentle clasp of her fingers, she scarcely dared impose on it. Even her own desire to find out about herself was not so great that she would willingly risk the pain it might give him to probe the wound of their own trouble. But he seemed to guess her feeling — the reason why she shook her head.

"Tell me, is it about Mrs. Pinchin?" he hazarded. "About her and my uncle? Yes, I thought so! But that's a thing we'd all like to find out. No," he added convincingly; "until you said you'd seen Mrs. Pinchin coming down the steps of his house, our wildest imagination never took in the possibility that he and Mrs. Pinchin knew each other. Now how he came to know her and what these two persons are to each other is as much of a puzzle as what they are really up to. Jove! I only wish I knew!"

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It seemed to Corrie that she was doomed to an everlasting hopelessness in trying to find out anything. Was there no one that knew? or was the secret to remain forever locked grimly in Mrs. Pinchin's breast? The utterly hopeless suggestion came to her that she would spend the rest of her life in just such disappointments. They had all been alike, from now back to the time when she had talked to the brown-haired boy with the bread and jam. Why had fate dragged up Mrs. Pinchin at the crucial moment? But it was fate, of course, the fate that always must pursue her. Now, if Mrs. Pinchin had not come along when she was talking to the brown-haired boy —

Corrie looked up with a startled little exclamation.

"Mr. Geikie! oh, how stupid of me! why, of course! There was a boy that lived in your house — no, I haven't told you about him before — and he had brown hair — thick, wavy, brown hair, and a —"

Corrie halted herself in time. "Do you remember my saying something this morning about a maiden locked up in an ogre's castle and how a Prince Charming came to her rescue?"

For a moment the young man looked at her thoughtfully, and then his hand stole to the tip of his nose and deliberately felt it.

"Yes, and I have a very distinct remembrance of your saying your Prince had a snub nose. I wonder whether you could possibly mean me?" he inquired ruefully. "Is it really as bad as that?"

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Corrie, laughing and blushing together, violently shook her head. "I take it all back! But listen!" she cried a little excitedly, "don't you remember talking to me through the back fence? Please try to remember. It was when I was a little girl. I lived in that house behind yours, and Mrs. Pinchin lived there, too."

He looked at her in astonishment. "Well, this is news to me!" he exclaimed; and so it was, as Corrie realized, when she recalled he had not been present when she told it to his mother and Mr. Biggamore. "You lived there! — in Uncle Stanwood's? I wish you'd tell me about it."

"No! wait a moment, won't you? Don't you remember climbing up on the top of the fence, and looking over? Then you got down and kicked in a loose board, and I was dreadfully frightened. You had a slice of bread and jam. Oh, don't you remember? You gave me a bite, and you were going to tell me what your father said, but Mrs. Pinchin came and dragged me away. Now! oh, can't you remember?"

But the moment the question had been spoken she regretted it with a sudden, awakening terror. For what would it be his father had told him? As well as not, it might entail some shameful revelation of just what she dreaded to learn, the true fact of her origin, and a fact so embarrassing that it might hurt him to repeat it. Or worse than that, something so shameful that he would not dare to reveal it at all! A frantic desire to warn him he must not try to think

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seized her, and she was just on the point of crying out she did n't care to know, when he spoke.

"I don't remember a thing about it, Miss Robinson," he declared, puckering his brow thoughtfully. "It was something my father told me, you say?" he repeated gravely, and there came into his eyes then, as she saw, the same look of shadowy pain that had clouded his mother's face when she spoke of the man long dead. "You see, my father died many years ago. It was just a day or so after we came to this house. He and I were alone there a day or so before mother came, and I must have forgotten what he told me." There he paused, and looked away still more thoughtfully.

Beyond, at the street end, the city's voice raised itself in a nearer, louder murmur; they were approaching Eighth Street, the Elevated, the surface cars, and all the rest of the busy life that trafficked noisily up and down the crowded thoroughfare of Sixth Avenue. An L train, rolling northward, gathered way from the station, and rumbling off on the high, stilted trestle, sent discordant, clanking echoes beating back and forth among the crowding walls of Jefferson Market and the brick buildings on the other side. A surface car, stalled behind a line of trucks and delivery wagons, clanged and clacked and clamored for the right of way; there was noise and activity, the town's turmoil, all around; and even the most unconcerned of the wayfarers coming out of the quiet side streets into that channel of the city's life, seemed to catch, on the instant, that same hurry

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and bustle, and to be quickened by it until they, too, unconsciously hurried.

But these two, absorbed only in themselves, seemed remotely distanced from that busy world so close beyond. "The fact is," said he, after a long pause, "my father killed himself, and it was because of this uncle of mine, Stanwood Geikie."

"Oh, how dreadful!" uttered the girl, shocked both by the words and the resentful tone in which they were spoken. "Oh, how terrible!"

"Yes," he answered, in the same, bitter, accusing voice, "Stanwood Geikie tricked and ruined him, and my father shot himself. I thought everyone knew; though, of course, you could n't. You were too young then. But it was n't because he had lost his money! No!" he laughed harshly, "that was n't the cause. And my mother — well, you can see what it 's done to her. She 's never gotten over it."

His voice had dropped into a quiet simplicity of tone after that first vindictive utterance, and its quietness shocked her even more. Once again, she laid a hand impulsively on his arm; for in the moment the girl realized how cruelly, even though unwittingly, she must have torn open the scar of their unforgettable trouble. "Oh, how sorry I am!" she whispered. "And to think how I must have hurt your mother!"

"Mother will forgive you; you could n't have known," he answered gently. "But this uncle of mine — " He paused long enough to control himself. "Well, the point is, that even after my

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father's death, my uncle would n't let us alone. All my mother's money was gone — yes, and most of Uncle Phil's too; we were nearly cleaned out, you know. So we had to move into this little house of ours. Well, we went on living there after father's death, and then one day we awoke and found Uncle Stanwood camped down right at our elbows. Mother and Uncle Phil nearly died of fright when they found it out — yes, they were nearly beside themselves, I think; and really you can't wonder at it, if you take into account what kind of man my Uncle Stanwood is. They thought he might do something to me; why, I could n't tell you, nor they either, perhaps, should one ask them. But why my Uncle Stanwood came to live there, right next to us, or why he has watched and spied and prowled around us so for years, no one seems able to understand. Mother believes we shall find out, some day, and she shudders every time she thinks of it."

"But has he never done anything, — ever tried to get at you, or anything like that?" asked Corrie, breathlessly. "Are n't you afraid of him?"

"I? Not for myself. He's tried to speak to me two or three times — oh, much more than that — dozens of times when I was a boy. When he'd see me coming, he'd begin to smile and get ready to pat me on the head, and then one time he offered me money. Jove, just think of it! the scoundrel handed me out a dollar, and a dollar looked as big to me in those days — why, as big as the moon. I was only fourteen then, and there was n't much money left for

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me to throw around — no, I should say not. But I took his dollar."

"You took it!" cried Corrie, the unflattering comment springing to her lips in her astonishment.

He smiled at her quietly. "Yes, I took it, and if you should ever see my Uncle Stanwood, look closely at the corner of his mouth. I was only a boy then, but I was a pretty vigorous boy, pretty hot tempered and able to understand, too, some of the things that had happened. Yes, I took his dollar, but I gave it back to him, too. I — but I won't speak of that — I should n't have mentioned it at all."

"But I wish to know," persisted the girl. "I wish you 'd tell me."

"There is n't anything to tell — very little except that he never offered me money again."

"What do you mean? You gave it back to him?"

"Yes, I pegged it at his head, and then I cut and ran for it as hard as I could up the street. He started after me, too; but then, he never stood a chance; and when I looked back he was holding a hand to his lip and shaking his fist. 'I'll fix you for this, you young whelp!' he roared, and shook his fist again. But he never bothered me after that, though Uncle Phil did n't let me off so easily."

"Why—why, what did he do?" questioned Corrie.

"Do? Well, he pulled my ear, if you really care to know. He was furious because I had stopped even long enough to let Stanwood Geikie hand me the dollar. My! but Uncle Phil was in a terrible stew. I thought he 'd pull out all his front hair before he got

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through storming at me. ‘Gave you a dollar, hey?’ he exploded, and went stamping out of the room, only to stamp back again shortly. ‘You pegged it at his head, did you?’ he roared, and I hung my head and said I had. ‘Outrageous!’ he burst out, and went clattering off, only to clatter back again a few minutes later. ‘Sure he hit him?’ he demanded. ‘Did you now, or are you just Major Bigtalk making up a good story?’ But I knew what I was talking about. ‘Hit him in the face, did it? Well!’ he exclaimed, and then my Uncle Phil came as near swearing as I ever knew him to come. Want to know what he said, Miss Robinson?’ inquired Phil, a twinkle in his eyes.

“No, no! you must n’t. I won’t listen!” cried Corrie, covering her two pink ears with two slender hands. But young Mr. Geikie rudely ignored her protest. “He said — Uncle Phil said, ‘Well, I’ll be jiggered! I’ll be eternally jiggered!’ With that, my uncle put his hand into his pockets, stuffed a whole handful of silver into my hat, and scowling terribly, rushed out and slammed the front door behind him. Yes, there was a good reason why my Uncle Stanwood never tackled me again.”

“Of course he would n’t,” laughed Corrie; “not after you’d thrown things at his head.”

“But it was n’t that altogether,” he corrected. “I think it was more because Uncle Phil took the law into his own hands. I found out later where he’d gone when he flung himself out and slammed the door

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behind him. He looks meek and mild enough, ordinarily, but I can tell you, too, that Uncle Phil does n't lack sand when it 's necessary — not a bit of it! Why, he marched straight around the corner to my Uncle Stanwood's and rang the bell, and when the servant opened the door, Uncle Phil brushed past her, and went right up the stairs to the man's room. Mother told me that much, and that Uncle Phil warned him to let me alone; but how he warned him or what he said and did, I can only surmise. I know, though, that Uncle Stanwood never bothered me again; no, he never so much as noticed me after that, unless it was occasionally to grin at me in that sardonic, supercilious way of his."

"But did you never learn," asked Corrie, "why he tried so hard to make friends with you?"

"No, it was just some whim of his, some deviltry, perhaps. I suppose if I 'd listened to him he would have tried to turn me into the kind of man he is himself. After that business of the dollar and what I 'd shown I thought of him, we rather hoped he 'd move out of the neighborhood. But he stayed on, year after year, and, after a while, we learned he owned that house. He 'd bought it, or he 'd got it away from the owners by some swindle or other — some way in which he is clever enough. It belonged to the Tollabees, the same people from whom we bought our own house."

Corrie, her face aglow with sudden excitement, interrupted him with an exclamation. "Tollabee! I know that name. Tell me!" she exclaimed, "who

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were those people? Tell me what you know of them!"

For that was the name that had been scrawled in a boyish hand on the fly leaf of the book of fairy tales:

"When this you see,
Remember me.

R. tollabee, his Book."

"Did the Tollabees own that house?" she cried breathlessly. "I wish, if you know, that you'd tell me about them. Who were they?"

He regarded her for a moment, perplexed by her growing excitement. "Yes, I know something about the family, though we have n't heard of them for years. See here, now, Miss Robinson, don't tell me they have anything to do with this Pinchin business — have they?" He, too, looked a little startled when she nodded her head. "Do you really mean it? *Phew!*" His exclamation of wonder was expressive. "Very well, then, I'll tell you what I know first, and then you've got to tell me what you know. In the first place, Margaret Tollabee was my Uncle Stanwood's wife — or is supposed to be, if she's still living. Now how does that strike you? Does it shed any light on the subject?"

Corrie answered him as calmly as the circumstances would permit. "I don't know yet. But was she related in any way to an R. Tollabee? I know only the name."

Phil nodded slowly. "You must mean Randolph

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Tollabee — and, well — why I think I 'll have to tell you the rest of it. The truth is, he was a friend of my father's; one of his closest friends," he added painfully. "After my father died — killed himself, Miss Robinson, they said my father had ruined him, too. My Uncle Stanwood spread the lie; we 've found out that much, anyway, and he did it to save himself. Of course, you can make up your mind what kind of man it is that lies about his own brother in that fashion — and when he 's dead and in the grave, too. Well, he 'll have to settle for that, some day."

So here was something else to add to the tangle. Corrie's mind tried to take it all in, but, at the best, her conclusions were of the vaguest. First Mrs. Pinchin, then Stanwood Geikie, and now the Tollabees, — wheels within wheels, and all buzzing comfortably. She recalled in the moment's confusion Mrs. Pinchin's own excitement over the name, her emotion at the time when Corrie, as a child, had gone to her — "I want my Tollabee book, Mrs. Pinchin." Phil seemed to read in her face some sign of her reflection.

"Do you happen to know anything about Randolph Tollabee?" he asked alertly, "and has it really anything to do with Mrs. Pinchin?"

She told him now. With no effort to conceal anything, she told of the book, and of her childhood, and of Mrs. Pinchin's swift confusion at the mention of the name. Nothing was omitted but the grave question of Corrie's origin; she was still unprepared to confess that openly — to him, last of all.

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“Queer, is n’t it?” he observed thoughtfully, biting his lip. “I don’t know how much it conveys to you, but to us who know — well, the least I can say is that it’s pretty significant.”

To Corrie it seemed quite as significant, or rather, suggestive. “Don’t you suppose,” she faltered hesitatingly, “that I could find Miss Tollabee, your Uncle Stanwood’s wife? Has n’t anything been heard of her lately? She might know something.”

He frowned thoughtfully before he answered. “I’ve been trying to remember what became of her,” he said slowly; “but I think she and her child — there was one, if I recall rightly — I don’t believe they’ve been heard of for years. My mother never knew any of the Tollabees but Randolph. Margaret was only his step-sister.”

They were at the Avenue crossing now, the square, brick tower of Jefferson Market looming high above, and the L trains rattling along the ugly overhead trestle. Many in the crowd stared curiously at the two — the girl and the young man; she flushed with excitement, and he grave and concerned. But they gave no heed. The tangled skein, though still knotted and snarled, seemed in a fair way to be unraveled, or, at least to be reaching a point where some dexter hand might attack it with some certainty of clearing up the snarl. “Well, we can’t do any more to-day to clear up this mess,” said Phil. He bit his lip again, and looked down at her curiously, almost attentively.

“No; and I must be getting home,” added Corrie,

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glancing up at the tower clock. "I had no idea it was so late. I wonder what Mrs. Pinchin will say."

He stared at her again, a little uncertainly, after he had guided her across the street to the stairs of the L station. "You'll come back to the house again, won't you?" he asked, and then added slowly: "You see, I think mother will want you to come back. Listen! if anything happens to you — at Mrs. Pinchin's I mean — you'll come to us, won't you. Of course," he went on guardedly, "nothing is likely to happen, but if it does, I hope you'll send for me."

"Oh, Mrs. Pinchin is n't likely to eat me!" laughed Corrie, lightly, and at her amusement he again looked at her curiously — so curiously that the smile faded. "Why, what is it?" she asked nervously, "do you know anything about Mrs. Pinchin you have n't told me?"

"No; it's not anything I know," he answered, still cautiously, "but I've begun to suspect something. I want you to promise me something — you will, won't you, Corrie?" *Corrie!* her heart thumped at that, though she said nothing to rebuke him. "If you need a friend, or someone to go to, why, I hope you'll think of us."

He took her hand, and this time without attempting to draw away, she let her fingers lie in his clasp. "Yes, I promise," she answered, smiling at him; "and it's very nice to have a friend, too."

He still held her hand, smiling once more. "Tell me something, won't you?" he asked, trying to hide the dancing light in his eyes.

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Corrie laughed again. "That depends. What is it?"

She felt his fingers tighten a little on hers. "You're going to be frightfully angry at me now," he warned, twinkling. "Last night — at Mrs. Pinchin's — why did you try to make yourself look so? You know what I mean."

Corrie burst into a little ripple of amusement and dragged her hand away. Then she blushed. "Dowdy, I suppose you mean. You would be dowdy, too," she answered, "if you were I — and are n't you just a little impertinent?"

"You have n't told me why, yet," he persisted, eyes still dancing.

"You're just as horrid as those other men," she declared, outraged, and there he burst into a laugh.

"I thought so! But you can't blame them for staring — when you're so pretty!"

Corrie, blushing furiously now, fled up the steps to the station away from him.

CHAPTER IX

Corrie's return. — Miss Maria's nerves and Mrs. Pinchin's ready remedy. — The item in the personal column. — Miss Maria's defiant plea. — Mrs. Pinchin reads the newspaper. — Her forced composure in the face of trying circumstances. — Miss Maria varies her habit of weeping by falling in a faint. — The astonishing keepsake hung around Miss Maria's neck. — Her terror on regaining her senses. — Phil telephones.

FILLED with this new-found knowledge, alive to the possible significance of her bewildering succession of discoveries, Corrie hurried homeward to Mrs. Pinchin's. She knew what she might expect when she reached there — a scene, perhaps, a blast of Mrs. Pinchin's vituperative rage, or, at the very least, a berating from Miss Maria in her most acid tones; yet, for the first time in her life, Corrie felt no fear of what might happen, no matter how great their anger. What she had found out had armed her with determined self-reliance; and though she still lacked a very clear idea of what her discoveries meant to herself, she was, at least, sure that she held a powerful trump card to play over Mrs. Pinchin's lead. If worst came to the worst, she would confront Mrs. Pinchin with what she had learned, and then she should see what happened.

But no — As the L train rumbled northward, she sat reflecting, and reflection showed her the

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unwisdom of such a course. No, she must do nothing like that. She must guard her secret craftily, awaiting the moment when it should prove of a real advantage. To let Mrs. Pinchin know now that she had learned, if not all, at least a hint of her singular history, might become a blunder never to be repaired. For Corrie, with a wisdom bred of long experience, could only acknowledge to herself that in point of cunning, craftiness, even determination, she was far outmatched by Mrs. Pinchin, and there was no telling what that determined lady might do to balk her were she to find out what Corrie knew. No, she must bide her time; hold her tongue; wait to play her trump card, when the moment came to turn the winning trick.

She reached the door and rang. Excuses, perhaps, were in order; but Corrie had none. Let them make a scene, if they wished; she was too tired to care much. A faint hope momentarily encouraged her — the possibility of reaching her room undetected. If she could n't — well —

It was Miss Maria who opened the front door — Miss Maria, peering forth nervously expectant. Many hours had passed since she had last laid eyes on Corrie — indeed, it was now after two o'clock in the afternoon — and though Miss Maria must have enjoyed an ample opportunity for nursing whatever wrath she felt, it bespoke itself now, only in a small ruffling of her brows. "Oh, it 's you, is it?" she commented, a scarcely perceptible mockery in her tone, "and where have you been, may I ask?"

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Corrie answered as briefly. "Down town, Miss Maria. I went on an errand — for myself."

"An errand — an errand — for yourself," echoed Miss Maria, dispiritedly. "Well it's no concern of mine. Mrs. Pinchin can do as she likes — yes. It's no concern of mine, and if you — —"

But the remainder of what Miss Maria had to say droned off into an indistinguishable, almost inaudible murmur, as she shambled toward the stairs. So that ordeal was over! It was easier, far easier even than Corrie had hoped.

Slowly she went on her way to her room. Already she felt the reaction from the day's excitement; she was weary, fagged out, depressed; and after taking off her hat and jacket, she dropped limply into the nearest chair, and folding her hands together, stared thoughtfully at the wall. Where was it all to end, and when? What was she to learn, too, once this tangle in her life had unraveled itself? A deep sigh escaped her, and then, with a little flutter of her heart and an awakening, softening light in her eyes, there flashed into the girl's mind anew the memory of that moment with the boy, the brief seconds when he had held her hand in his, and, for the first time, unconsciously had uttered her name. *Corrie!* That name, at least, held some significance now — something, as if it had been given to her with a real baptismal — a meaning to dignify it ever in her mind! Then a furious blush mounted to her cheeks, and, after a quick, conscious glance at the mirror on her dressing table, a glance that added only to her confusion, she

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leaped up from her chair and stepped out into the hall.

The house was silent. Corrie, tiptoeing to the balustrade, listened for a moment and then opened a door at her right. It led into the dark, stuffy garret where for years Mrs. Pinchin had stored the discarded odds and ends of her many possessions; yet dark and crowded as it was, Corrie moved confidently into its darkness.

At each side of the doorway the Pinchin trunks raised a double wall — fat, immense, brass-bound, portly trunks, the kind that just such a person as Mrs. Pinchin would affect. Beyond them the garret was stacked from the floor to the ceiling with the indiscriminate flotsam and jetsam of her housekeeping — broken-down chairs and tables, superannuated bedsteads and bureaus, decrepit towel racks and picture frames, rolls of rugs and carpets, moth-eaten and threadbare; and, with it all, set about on the floor and on bureau and table-tops, a perfect infirmary of chinaware and bric-a-brac. In that alone one might have calculated to a nicety the various eras of Mrs. Pinchin's domestic history, though it was now for no such a purpose that Corrie threaded her way among its dust-laid, narrow channels, making for a distant corner. There the cracked and blistered mirror of a dressing table gleamed like a beacon to guide her, and reaching down beneath it, Corrie pulled open its lowest drawer.

A bulky bundle wrapped in yellowing newspaper met her hand. She drew it forth from its hiding

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place, and after carefully closing the drawer again, Corrie tiptoed back to her room. There she stripped off the wrappings, and drawing a chair to the window, began slowly turning over the pages of this dearest possession of hers — the fat, brass-bound, leather portrait album.

One by one, the hours passed; darkness fell on the city. From her high window the girl could look southward over the sweep of roofs and chimneys far down into the heart of the striving, big and impulsive, thoughtless, careless town. Somewhere within it — somewhere within its maze of streets and avenues and boulevards — somewhere within that countless myriad of houses that raised their blank, untelling faces beside the way — somewhere there lived and breathed and knew, perhaps, the ones in whose breast was locked the key to that mystery she longed to solve — the secret of herself. But where was she to look — where to turn her face, expectantly or with hope? She stared down at the sprawling city, its length and breadth lost now in the gathering dusk; and out of the darkness, its lights, growing like the sky's stellar host, winked back at her merrily, bright and twinkling and careless, dancing in the crisp spring air as if they jeered her in mockery. If she had friends, a single friend — But Corrie had no friends. Mrs. Pinchin had deprived her of that — denied her even the least of them — denied her that as she had deprived the child of her childhood. No friends — no one — not even —

Pale, transfigured, her shadowy eyes filled with

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deeper, graver shadow, the girl arose and stared long through her window southward at the darkening city. Somewhere within its heart — somewhere there far down among its streets — yes, after all, there was *one* — one, indeed — really one had taken pity. Slowly, all unconscious of herself, she stretched forth her hands together. "Friend — friend! Be that always — my friend — *dear* friend!" she whispered, a faint smile playing on her lips. "One friend — yes!" Then she turned away.

Long afterward, the girl arose in the dark and lighted her table lamp — an oil lamp, since Mrs. Pinchin admitted no such extravagance for her paid companion as the use of gas. Sitting down beside the light, she picked up the album again, and began to wrap it up. A step sounded on the stair; she paused, listening. The step drew nearer; she thrust the book on the table, her heart beating the instant's alarm. Mrs. Pinchin — yes! The door flew open and there she stood — Mrs. Pinchin with her cane uplifted, leveled like an accusing finger. Thus came Mrs. Pinchin, fired with an ugly wrath. "You!" she cried. "You!"

But out of this dramatic event, as dramatic as any in the eventful day, Corrie obtained one piece of knowledge, at least, that became of immediate advantage. It was the knowledge that Mrs. Pinchin no longer dared treat her as she had treated her when a child. Furthermore, Mrs. Pinchin's quick surrender to her threat that Corrie would leave, assured Corrie she held another trump card — though why, she

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could n't decide. But that Mrs. Pinchin really feared something like this was evident, obvious even though there were no more explanation of the cause than there was to the other perplexities that had crowded together in the day. Whatever the reason, it gave added strength to her confidence. For, once that she had shown fear, Mrs. Pinchin was no longer so terribly to be feared.

"No, Mrs. Pinchin," Corrie had said quietly, "you know who I am. Some day — on your death-bed, perhaps — some day you will tell me. I shall not leave you till then."

Then, after that encounter, came the further re-action. The door closed on Mrs. Pinchin's departing figure; the girl turned, drew her breath sharply, and all her courage running to the dregs, she threw herself on her bed and gave way to weakening, relieving tears. Long afterward she arose, undressed, and crept down among the covers. Sleep — oh, if she could sleep, and in that find forgetfulness! Once more, in the dark, Corrie sat up in her bed and pressed her feverish hands to her hot and throbbing temples. *Corrie Who?* and *Corrie What?* Could she never, never learn?

Downstairs in her room Mrs Pinchin, armed with a bottle of smelling-salts, sat propped up in her own bed. Miss Maria, white and shifty-eyed, sat beside her, her spare figure gauntly outlined in her cotton nightdress, her hair screwed up into an attenuated pigtail, and all the more grotesque, homely and un-

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appealing in her *décolleté*. Staring through her spectacles at Mrs. Pinchin, who was holding the smelling-salts first to one nostril and then to the other and snuffing and sniffing absorbedly, Miss Maria suddenly burst into tears.

“Judie — oh, please, please, Judie, won’t you tell me what we’re going to do?”

Mrs. Pinchin removed the salts from her nose. “Here, you stop that!” she ordered truculently; “if you ain’t got any spunk of your own, I ain’t going to let you make me miserable. Get out of here — do you hear me?”

The door closed on Miss Maria’s abject figure, and leaning over to the table beside the bed, Mrs. Pinchin helped herself to a glass of sherry and a vanilla wafer. Guzzling and grunting, overwrought, irritated even in that moment of grateful self-indulgence, she gulped down the sherry noisily, set the glass on the stand, and then with a last final scowl of annoyance, reached up and turned out the gas. “Hunh!” she grunted, and reposed herself to slumber.

Morning came — another day. Throughout the long, wakeful night Corrie had tossed in fitful dreams. Glad of the dawn, at last, she arose long before either Mrs. Pinchin or Miss Maria were awake, and dressing hastily, made her way quietly down the stairs.

Maggie, the surly housemaid, had just finished sweeping the drawing-room and hall. She acknowled-

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edged Corrie's good morning with her usual grumpiness, and picking up the dustpan and broom, clumped away down the passage to the basement stairs. Corrie wandered aimlessly about the silent rooms, wondering how long it would be before she could hope for breakfast, and she was still wondering when she heard Maggie toiling up the stairs again. The maid appeared to be in a less surly, offensive mood. "Wad ye like a cup o' coffee?" she asked almost civilly, "and the bit av a roll to it?" Corrie thanked her gratefully, and presently Maggie returned with a tray. Setting it down on the dining-room table, she waited until Corrie had seated herself, and then backed off as far as the hearth rug, where she planted herself with her hands folded beneath her apron. "Anyway, it's a hard time ye're havin' wit them two ladies," she growled, as if offering a brief explanation for her decency; "sure I c'd be sorry for ye meself."

Flushing painfully, Corrie sent the girl back to her work. "Oh, ye're a lady, anyhow," Maggie grumbled, determined to have her say; "it don't take more 'n the fill av me eyes to see ut, an' that's what I wudd n't say av others I c'd name."

Corrie ignored this, too, but the girl had no sooner withdrawn than there rushed over Corrie the feeling that she had been both unkind and unjust in resenting what was meant only as a kindness, one of the very few, too, she had known in that house. While she was still considering it, Maggie reappeared.

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"Wad ye have a look at the morning's paper?" asked the girl; and Corrie, with a new note of gentleness in her voice, thanked her with a smile.

Corrie rarely read the newspapers; but rather than offend Maggie by her indifference, she propped it up in front of her and idly scanned the columns while she munched her toast. It was the usual type of the metropolitan journal, the highly seasoned summary of a day's events, a kind of highly flavored *hors d'œuvre* to tickle the morning's jaded palates. One saw in its sprawling, loosely-knitted headlines the usual artful, ingenious effort to alarm the idle eye into interest; the usual frantic, appealing struggle to idealize the commonplace, amusing for all its vulgarity, interesting even in its ignorance. To-day, with its astonishing type and its highly entertaining and utterly improbable pictures, it was just as entertaining and improbable as it had been yesterday, and, by the same token, would be to-morrow, and, without doubt, the day afterward. News of all kinds was set forth; news instructive, amusing, dire; a great deal of one, as much of the other, and not less of the remainder. News of love, passion, and greed; news real, and news immaterial; big news and little news, tragedy and comedy; news of the living and news of the dead; all the news there was was there; news that played its part in happiness and grief; in comfort and despair. Corrie skimmed through it all, vaguely entertained, and then, as she folded the paper together, the caption in the upper left-hand corner of the front page appealed to her.

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“PERSONAL.”

Munching the last of her toast, she read carelessly, her eye drifting down the column of advertisements. They, too, were of the usual kind, the usual paragraphs — vital, banal, appealing, delusive — as the case might be. There were the requests for someone to return home and all would be forgiven; the characteristic inquiries for missing persons; the obvious and everyday baits to trap the unwary; the artful, or, on the other hand, equally innocent allurements stamped with that ironclad guarantee of good faith, “object, matrimony.” Corrie read along, lightly amazed that so many young and vivacious widows, so many middle-aged gentlemen with means, so many young and prosperous business men with futures should find it necessary, with all their advantages, to appeal so publicly for a mate. But there, too, well on toward the column’s end, a name caught her eye, as she skipped along. Alertly she returned to it and read; and as she read, the girl’s heart leaped suddenly in a convulsive bound, beat stridently and sent the blood of excitement coursing through her veins.

TOLLABEE — Anyone knowing the present whereabouts of the heir or heirs of Randolph Tollabee, deceased, will be suitably rewarded by communicating with Earnest, Box 112.

Corrie, with starting eyes, snatched up the newspaper. “Randolph Tollabee, deceased!” The name roared through her head as if the print were shouting it vociferously. But what Randolph Tollabee, deceased? Was it but a coincidence of names; or was

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it, indeed, one and the same with the man whose life seemed to be linked so closely, though so indefinitely, with hers? A third time she read, and then fluttering, excited, tensely strung, she let the paper fall from her hands and arose unsteadily to her feet.

For there had leaped into her mind impulsively the thought that if this were the same Randolph Tollabee, others must be told of it — Phil, his mother, and his uncle. Still impulsively she slipped into the pantry where the house telephone hung on the wall beside the dumbwaiter. With nervous, clumsy fingers, she turned the pages of the subscribers' directory, hunting for the "G's," "G for Geikie," she murmured hurriedly, her finger running down the list; then, just as she had found it, Maggie came slouching into the pantry.

"Ain't ye a goin' to eat yer coffee and toast?" she demanded aggrievedly, "and me at all the bother to git it for ye?"

Distracted by the question, Corrie lost her place in the directory. "G for Geikie. Yes, leave it on the table — in a minute," she answered, all absorbed. Then, as Maggie withdrew, she found the number.

"Spring 9983 . . . Geikie, Philip, architect, 57 Hedge Street."

But just as Corrie reached up to take the receiver off the hook, a step sounded on the stair. It was Miss Maria's step, and she was heading for the dining room. Corrie slipped back into her place at the table, and picked up her coffee cup.

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"Good morning, Miss Maria," she said, and looked around.

Miss Maria stared at her blankly. "Oh, good morning," she answered, as if with an effort, and then glanced covertly at the unfinished breakfast.

Corrie saw the look. "Maggie brought it to me early," she explained. "Won't you let me share it with you?" Miss Maria screwed her mouth uncomfortably, shook her head, and, as if about to say something, folded her hands before her. But changing her mind, apparently, she hunched up her shoulders and affected to straighten out the silver on the buffet. "Humph!" Corrie heard her sniff, and then the force of custom seemed to get the better of Miss Maria, and she vented her feelings in something that, if not uncomfortable, was at least not reassuring. "Well, suit yourself. Have your breakfast when you want, but — Hunh! Don't you know Mrs. Pinchin's coming down again this morning?"

Miss Maria drifted away into the front room after that, and Corrie finished her breakfast immersed in thought. Her first impulse to call the Geikies' attention to the personal no longer seemed so imperative. Should she tell them or not? What if they thought her officious and presuming? Already, in her innocence, she had ventured beyond the bounds of propriety; to venture further would be impossible.

Then came another thought. What, too, if Mrs. Pinchin saw that advertisement? There was no greater reason than suspicion to suggest either she

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or Miss Maria would be interested in the inquiry; if they were, what then? But how should Mrs. Pinchin be made to see that graphic paragraph? One way was for Corrie to point it out in person; another was to put the paper where Mrs. Pinchin's eagle eye would detect it unaided. A flush mounted to Corrie's face at the thought of such duplicity. Tossing the paper away from her, she hurried out of the room, and Maggie, coming in a few minutes later to set the table, found it on the floor, and laid it at Mrs. Pinchin's place.

It was an hour later when the mistress of the house presented herself at the breakfast table. Sleep, even with all its restoring touches, had not composed Mrs. Pinchin's features to a peaceful restfulness. There was a scowl in her dark, heavy-lidded eyes, a threat as if the lady had not found the bright world of a spring morning entirely to her liking. She lurched laboriously to the breakfast table, and without waiting for Corrie's aid, dragged out her chair with first a covert stare at the girl and then a scowl of contempt for the uneasy Miss Maria.

Again the pantomime of Mrs. Pinchin's morning meal renewed itself. With her eyes rolling about the room as if — literally — in search of what she might devour, she reached out her hand for her napkin and encountered the folded newspaper.

Corrie, seeing it there, almost gasped aloud. But Mrs. Pinchin, with a contemptuous flick of her hand, tossed the paper aside, and flirting open her napkin with a slap like the crack of a whip, spread the dam-

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ask over the ample breast of her pink silk morning sack. Then, as on the morning before, she began the introductory comedy of snatching for the oranges, selecting first one and then another until satisfied that the best in the platter was hers. Maggie, passing onward, handed the fruit to Corrie, who silently shook her head. When the oatmeal was passed, she refused that also, and Mrs. Pinchin, chancing to look up at the moment, instantly demanded explanation. "What's that now?" she rasped irritably, her spoon suspended on its way to her waiting mouth, "why ain't you eating? Anything wrong with the oatmeal?"

Corrie answered: "No — why, no. I've break-fasted already!"

"Oh, you have, have you?" Concerned as Corrie was with other matters, she had forgotten for the moment Mrs. Pinchin's rule that none should eat before her. "You mean to say," began Mrs. Pinchin, breaking off long enough to gulp the waiting oatmeal, "you mean to say you've been ordering my —"

The sentence, however it meant to convey her displeasure, was for some reason abruptly cut short in the middle. Some thought appeared to strike into her mind, and her features, at the outset angry and contemptuous, were suddenly smoothed into another and much less bellicose expression. Indeed, it became almost obvious that Mrs. Pinchin, in that moment's reflection, had instantly regretted her threatening manner, and now was even trying, with

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a powerful effort, to organize an amiable smile. "Oh, yes — of course — certainly. You must have your breakfast when you want it. Yes, indeed! Pass the cream, Maggie."

Perhaps, in that moment of thought, Mrs. Pinchin recalled her promises of the night before; the decision to show Corrie the consideration that so long had been denied her; and, with another gallus, loose-jawed grin, another vital effort to look genial and conciliatory, Mrs. Pinchin returned to her oatmeal.

Beside her the newspaper still lay unheeded. Breathing and gulping, smacking her lips in enjoyment, she made way with the cereal, and then set to work as assiduously on a generous portion of *sautéed* liver and bacon attended by creamed potatoes. As usual, she plied into this with every evidence of cordial satisfaction, in the midst of which she looked up abruptly, with a grunt alarming in its loudness, and grinned in Corrie's face.

"Hunh! I ran across that fellow Alfuente yesterday. What do you suppose he said to me?"

Mr. Alfuente, as it may be remembered, was the lean, oily musician of Mrs. Pinchin's drawing-room who had tried his blandishments on Corrie. The girl heard his name with unconcern.

"Yes," drawled Mrs. Pinchin, running her tongue around between her lips and her teeth, "what do you suppose?" She darted another look at Corrie, and broke into a thick, gurgling chuckle. "He'd got it into his head you were my daughter." She blinked humorously as she made this revelation.

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“Yes, and he’s dead set on giving you music lessons. He said he would n’t charge anything, either — just for art’s sake, you know. I guess you must have made an impression on him.”

Corrie frowned openly, but made no answer, and Mrs. Pinchin still rattled gaily on, buoyant and confident, as if fully aware of her own condescension. “Not such a bad idea, do you think? I told him he might call around some time, and we’d talk it over.”

Pancakes arrived at this moment and distracted Mrs. Pinchin’s attention; and absorbed in her new trencher work, she became too busy to say more. Corrie, her chin in her hand, pored intently on her. She was not so young, not so easily to be deluded by any such forced effort at geniality; and while she watched, her brain was busy wondering how long Mrs. Pinchin would waste her time with the artifice of good nature, once she saw the advertisement. Though conscious that Miss Maria was intently watching her during her own study of Mrs. Pinchin, Corrie gave no heed to the sly scrutiny. Nor was she even much affected by a memory of those impertinent comments, Mrs. Pinchin’s jocose and offensive reflection about Mr. Alfuente and why he wished to give Corrie music lessons. Tensely absorbed, the girl waited the moment when Mrs. Pinchin’s eye should fall on that important paragraph; though there were moments too, when, in her agitation, she could have leaped up, snatched away the paper, and thrown it into the blazing grate.

Mrs. Pinchin, intent on striking an exact balance

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between the last morsel of pancake and the final drop of syrup, had buried her eyes in her plate. With a dexterous knife she pursued the elusive, surviving trickle to its last stand; with an implacable, merciless fork she impaled the hunted tidbit. Already that last votive offering to her appetite had been raised toward her mouth. A moment more and it would have passed, sacrificed, from view, when Mrs. Pinchin halted suddenly in the ceremonial, and as suddenly broke into speech. "Order the carriage for ten," said she, bolted the mouthful, and, with a clatter of knife and fork, switched back in her chair and addressed Corrie. "How'd you like a carriage ride? You can come along, too."

To ride in Mrs. Pinchin's carriage, if Mrs. Pinchin were in it, was a signal mark of that lady's favor and high opinion. It was so much one, indeed, that Corrie had rarely enjoyed it — not in the least, perhaps, that it meant a real enjoyment, but rather the contrary. For on these occasions, rare as they were, when Corrie took the air in Mrs. Pinchin's equipage, she was never allowed to share the width and comfort of the cushiony back seat on which Mrs. Pinchin lolled in ease and dignity. Instead, she was perched uncomfortably on a small, awkward, stool-like arrangement in front, which, when it was not in use, was folded up under the forebody of the brougham. To add to this discomfort, the girl, on these occasions, was made still further miserable by Mrs. Pinchin's continual and petulant warning "keep your feet away" — "move over there" — "stop nudging

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into me." For in her carriage, as elsewhere, Mrs. Pinchin was jealous of her comfort, and, after all, why should n't she have been? Was she, for even a moment, to be made irritable and uncomfortable by one who was hired to insure her comfort? Certainly not. . .

But at Mrs. Pinchin's invitation to Corrie, Miss Maria raised her eyes in alarm. "But you promised *me* — you promised —" began Miss Maria, intensely concerned and excited. Mrs. Pinchin cut her short.

"Nonsense! I promised nothing of the kind." She knitted her shaggy brows together at Miss Maria, as if trying to bully her into silence; but for the moment Miss Maria was not to be bullied.

"If you don't, I'll go alone!" she cried, with a new and altogether astonishing determination. "You've got to take me, or I will."

Mrs. Pinchin made no answer. Rolling her napkin into a ball, she tossed it on the table and pushed back her chair, and Miss Maria, with her eyes still flashing determinedly, followed suit. But while Mrs. Pinchin was reaching around for her stick, her glance encountered the folded newspaper. "I'm going! — do you hear?" spoke Miss Maria, convincingly; and Mrs. Pinchin picked up the newspaper, and sticking it under her arm, put it down again and stared at her darkly.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," she said in a slow, minatory voice. Rolling her head from side to side, as if to give emphasis to her words, she fastened her

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eyes threateningly on the other. Miss Maria clasped her hands together, and, unmindful of Corrie, cried out piteously.

"Oh, Judie, Judie!" she almost wailed. "Judie, if you don't take me, I'll go out of my head."

"Keep your tongue still! Do you hear me? I've had enough of that now."

Miss Maria, with another appealing look, bit her lip and seemed ready to burst into tears. "You'll break my heart," she began, faltering, when Mrs. Pinchin stilled her with a sharp and angry exclamation.

"You look at here now! If you ——"

A thick grunt of disdain broke off the unfinished sentence, and contemptuously again Mrs. Pinchin scowled at her relation. Miss Maria said no more, and, as if assured that the scene had ended, Mrs. Pinchin flicked the crumbs from her skirt, reached around for her cane, and then let her eyes again drift casually toward the newspaper.

"Come, if you're ready," she was saying, when the words were arrested. "Come, if you're ready, we'll ——"

That was all. She set down the cane against the side of her chair, pored intently at the newspaper a moment, and then reached out her hand for the glass of water before her. Holding it to her mouth, her eyes still fastened on the print, she read and drank together. Quietly then the glass was removed from her lips; she set it on the table and as quietly leaned forward. A tense moment followed. Corrie, ready

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to cry aloud, could have snatched the paper from her hand, but Corrie, instead, sat breathless. Watching intently, she saw the heavy-lidded eyes flicker momentarily. Mrs. Pinchin's throat convulsed itself an instant as if in the reflex of swallowing something; then over Mrs. Pinchin's sallow, profoundly heavy face there crept a ghastly, leprous whiteness. A deep breath, like a sigh, escaped her. Working her lips as if her tongue suddenly had become feverishly dry, she reached for the glass of water once more, and raised it hazardously to her mouth. All the while her eyes were kept riveted on the print; she read, replaced the glass on the table, widened her nostril in another stifled gasp, and then slowly, majestically, terribly, she raised her head and stared about her like an offended, tragic Medea.

What storm spent its turmoil within the recesses of Mrs. Pinchin's brain, only she could know; yet fierce as it must have been, and frightful, as the convulsion of her face clearly showed, the struggle to control was greater, more masterful, even almost noble. For all the hurricane forces of her emotion swept by soundlessly, betrayed by no other sign than the momentary pallor, the instant's disorder of her features, the brief working of her jaws. Quietly she turned to Corrie and spoke, and only a slight thickness of her voice showed the emotion that even then must have tugged at her heart strings.

“The smelling-salts — on my bureau — I want them.”

Dominant, imperious, masterful, all the old self-

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control regained again. "Hurry!" she ordered roughly.

Corrie, on trembling feet, made her way to the door. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Mrs. Pinchin lean forward across the table and silently push the paper into Miss Maria's hand. Miss Maria took it, amazed and disconcerted. "Why, what is it? Why ——"

"Look at it — *there!*" rumbled Mrs. Pinchin, hollowly.

Then, when Corrie was half-way up the stair, the climax came. "God!" said a profound, quivering voice, thickly wheezing, choked with crowded emotion, "God ——" After that there was silence.

The smelling-salts were not on the bureau, as Mrs. Pinchin had said, and it was only after a long search that Corrie found the vial under the bed pillows. Yet once she had found what she hunted for, Corrie's hurried activities came to a sudden end. As she turned to go back to the dining room the pier glass beside the window flashed at her the vision of her pale and frightened self; and all the more terrified at the sight of it, she shrank back and stared at herself questioningly. What now? For now that the dramatic, vitally tragic situation had been brought about — now that she had witnessed the tumult it had made — she dared hardly return to the scene. But while she halted, debating wildly, a cry, fierce and authoritative, rang through the house. "Quick — come here — help me!" A moment later another cry followed. "Oh ——" Then, as if in emphasis,

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there was a clink of breaking glassware, a louder and more prolonged crash, and a muffled thud as of a heavy weight fallen to the floor.

Mrs. Pinchin — it was *she!* Rushing from the room, Corrie sped down the stairs, a hand on the balusters to support her; and wild with consternation and regret, almost palsied by her terror, she reached the floor below. Mrs. Pinchin! Had the promised stroke fallen at last? — and had Corrie been virtually the cause of it?

But there in the doorway of the dining room stood Mrs. Pinchin herself — Mrs. Pinchin still among the living. She had forsaken her stick in this moment of fierce and impelling distraction, and with her face flaming and her body rigidly erect, she towered beside the doorway, one hand outstretched to snatch the smelling-salts from Corrie. "Quick! raise her up!" she commanded hoarsely, and with another forceful gesture, pointed to the floor beside the table.

There lay a loose and formless figure, a shape huddled within itself inertly and half concealed beneath the drapery of the table cover. The cloth, dragged with the figure in its fall, had sluiced down upon the floor a torrent of glass, chinaware, and silver; a chair had toppled over, too, and on the edge of all this confusion, her mouth open in silly dismay, her hands raised in terror, stood Maggie the waitress, ready at the word to break into a chorus of screams. For the huddled figure that lay on the floor was Miss Maria's. The shock, whatever it had been, had

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passed by the stalwart, capable Mrs. Pinchin, and had wreaked all its potent forces on the weaker vessel of the two. Maggie, unable to restrain her excitement, essayed an experimental yell. "Go — clear out!" interposed Mrs. Pinchin in a voice of rage. "Get away from here!" Maggie, all the more astounded, fled to the pantry, and Corrie fell on her knees beside Miss Maria.

Even in that moment of her own high emotion, the girl felt a small, aching pity for the forlorn woman who lay there senseless. Poor Miss Maria! There had been moments when she had shown almost kindness to Corrie, and the girl was not one readily to forget a thing like that. Filled with instant compassion, dismayed, all her presence of mind departing, she strove awkwardly to loosen the throat of Miss Maria's dress; then she crouched back and vainly wrung her hands. "Oh — oh!" she cried, horrified, and once more tried to tear apart the prostrate woman's stiff linen collar. "Oh, what shall I do?"

It was at this point that all the determination of Mrs. Pinchin's character asserted itself, — the able, resolute firmness that could display its force even in a moment as overwhelming as this. "Raise her head!" she directed energetically; "now open her collar — tear it loose!" she commanded, and Corrie, exerting all her strength, tore it open. With clumsy, unable fingers she managed somehow, under Mrs. Pinchin's fierce dictation, to unbutton the breast of Miss Maria's waist, and there, as the dress was thrown apart, the girl's fingers encountered a gold medallion strung

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on a ribbon from Miss Maria's lean and unlovely throat.

Mrs. Pinchin's alert eye caught the glint of gold; with unexpected quickness she leaned down, and, shoving Corrie's hands away, snatched at the ribbon. "What's this?" she questioned under her breath, and with a vigorous tug, broke the fastening. But in that moment the girl, watching shrewdly, had caught a full glimpse of the medallion's obverse side. It held within its setting a miniature painted on ivory, the face of a young man, handsome, self-assured, and with an expression in the quiet eyes almost of contemptuous disdain. It was a face known and familiar, and though much younger in this likeness than the original of to-day, there was no mistaking the identity.

In other words, Miss Maria wore at her throat the portrait of Mrs. Pinchin's familiar and curious guest, the nonchalant Mr. Stanton.

"Well, ——" Mrs. Pinchin, with her eyes flickering in an instant's astonishment, stared at the miniature, and then thrust it into the capacious pocket of her skirt. A lurking grin of contempt contorted her lips for the instant, and then resuming her directions hurriedly, she held out the vial of smelling-salts.

"Here, put this to her nose!" she ordered roughly. "Give her a good sniff — no, not that way! Hold it there till she feels it! There! that's it!"

Under the heroic treatment Miss Maria's hands

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presently began to flutter wildly. She sighed, her huddled limbs outstretched themselves, she breathed a deep gasp, and then her eyelids quivered like stricken wings. But the moment the pale eyes opened to awakened sense Miss Maria stared at Mrs. Pinchin, and with clawlike hands began clutching at Mrs. Pinchin's knees. "Oh, Judie — oh, my God, Judie!" she wailed, oblivious of the girl who supported her; "oh, what are we going to do! What *are* we going to do!"

"Hush!" cried Mrs. Pinchin, stridently, beating down the fingers that clawed at her. She laid a swift hand on Miss Maria's mouth, quelling the words that still flocked to her lips. "Here — get on your feet!" ordered Mrs. Pinchin, in a determined voice. She leaned down, and aided by Corrie, dragged the limp and sobbing woman to an upright position. "Come now, control yourself," she rasped irritably. "How long are you going to keep on acting like a fool?"

Miss Maria obeyed to the extent of standing on her feet, and then leaning on Corrie, was guided to the nearest chair. But she had no sooner fallen into this seat when the stress of all she had undergone again became too great for self-control. Burying her face in her hands, she rocked to and fro. "Oh, Judie, Judie — oh what — —"

"Silence!" roared Mrs. Pinchin, furiously.

In her room, a half hour later, Corrie closed the door behind her, and almost as if in terror, she laid a hand over her own fluttering heart. Once more she asked herself the oft-repeated question: What was

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to be done? This time the thought brought its own swift decision. To live there longer, to remain in that house hedged around by the unknown, to stay amid all that crowding mystery seemed intolerable. It could last no longer. The time had come now when Mrs. Pinchin should no longer dominate her life — bend her submissively to every caprice of her never-ending bullying and greediness. The girl had no plans for the future, and as for money itself — Yes, Mrs. Pinchin had paid her a salary, a regular stipend, a monthly indebtedness discharged largely in figures of speech. "*Money?* What do you need of money, a girl like you? Have n't I told you it 's been put by in the bank?" Corrie had never been able to learn when this bank deposit would become hers in fact, rather than in fiction; nor had she ever discovered from Mrs. Pinchin's vague references the exact whereabouts of the bank. But now, fully determined, she would insist on Mrs. Pinchin giving her the money she had earned, and with that in hand, and with the sublime confidence of youth, good health, and buoyant mind, she felt sure that even in that striving, thoughtless, big, and selfish city, whose life heaved so close at hand like the billows of a sea, she could keep her head afloat. She would do it willy nilly, money or no.

So now! Turning abruptly, she locked the door and began spreading out her possessions on the bed. In the moment's sudden determination she had forgotten all else — even her promise of the night before, the self-made promise that she would stay with

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Mrs. Pinchin until she had learned the secret of her birth. Then, in the midst of her hurried labors, a knock sounded on the door.

“Please, miss,” said Maggie the waitress, “ye’re wanted at the phoone. He ’ll be in a hurry, too, by the voice of him.”

CHAPTER X

The appointment. — Corrie tries to escape. — Mrs. Pinchin's wrath and her ugly warning. — Mr. Stanton reappears. — Mrs. Pinchin's alarm concerning her papers. — The escape. — Central Park in the early morning. — The Tollabees, Uncle Stanwood, Mrs. Pinchin et al. — The rustic bridge and what happened thereon. — Young love almost has its way.

CORRIE closed her door and followed Maggie down the stairs.

“Who is it at the telephone?” she asked anxiously, at the same time flushing consciously with the knowledge that she need hardly ask that question.

“Sure, and how would I know?” answered Maggie, unaffectedly. “I didn’t think to ask your friend his name.”

Hurrying into the pantry, Corrie picked up the receiver. “Yes, who is it?” she asked in a restrained voice; then over the wire came the reply.

“Good morning. I knew you could n’t guess. It is I — Phil Geikie.”

Though Corrie’s back was turned, she was aware subconsciously that Maggie had planted herself a few feet away, and was listening with every evidence of an amiable and knowing satisfaction. Yet it was not altogether due to this that the flush crept into Corrie’s face anew, or that her reply was broken and disjointed.

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"Oh, yes — why, of course it's — I mean —" Corrie, with an effort, composed herself, though she still fluttered inwardly. "Good morning. Will you wait just a moment?" The tell-tale flush still mantled her face and neck rosily as she turned around to the maid. "Maggie, I want you to go down-stairs at once," she directed in a firm voice. "What I have to say over the telephone is very private. Go!" she bade her.

"Owh! — and was it *that* he's a telling ye?" exclaimed Maggie, with a wondering air of the utmost meaning. "And over the phone!" A wide grin stretched itself over Maggie's face as she withdrew regretfully.

"Mercy!" cried the voice over the wire, "I was afraid, for a moment, from your tone of voice, that you meant me!" Then after this sally he became suddenly grave. "Tell me," he asked quickly, "have you seen this morning's newspapers? There's an advertisement that will interest you."

Corrie cut in abruptly. "You mean about those people?" She dared not mention the name aloud for fear that someone might overhear. But Phil understood. "Yes — yes, I've seen it!" she answered hurriedly, "do you know what it means? *They've seen it, too.*"

"Not Mrs. Pinchin!" buzzed the telephone, humming with the intensity of the voice at the other end of the wire. "Do you mean her? What happened?"

But to tell him all that with the chance of Mrs. Pinchin herself overhearing how her curious conduct

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was regarded by another seemed too great a risk to take. "I can't speak of it now — you must wait — when I see you again," she responded nervously. "It was a great deal that happened — almost dreadful. It *was* dreadful!"

"Dreadful!" she heard him repeat in a concerned voice. "Do you mean for yourself? You *must* tell me!" he insisted.

On the floor above, a slow and limping footfall plodded about, the glassware on the pantry shelves tinkling in time to the precision of that ponderous tread. Corrie thought the heavy feet headed for the stairway, as if Mrs. Pinchin by instinct, divination, a super sense, had awakened to what was going on on the floor below her. "Listen — I cannot tell you now!" cried the girl, rapidly, "if I could — When I see you again. Not now, but the next time we meet."

"That's the very thing I want!" came the instant rejoinder. "I want to see you. I must — and to-day!"

Corrie was about to utter a nervous objection when he interrupted her, clearly determined. "No! no, no!" she began; but apparently he was not to be deterred.

"Yes, you must. I'm going uptown at once to see you. Do you understand? I'm going straight to the Park entrance at Seventy-second Street, and I'll be there — wait, let me look at my watch — I'll be there waiting for you in twenty-five minutes. Can you hear me? — at five minutes after ten."

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A faintly murmured *yes* went over the wire, half heard at the other end, yet still clearly understood.

"You'll surely be there, won't you? Because —"

But blushing hotly, waiting to hear no more, Corrie hurriedly hung the receiver on the hook and fled. And not any too soon, it appeared; for as Corrie reached the dining-room door she heard the limping footfall above renew itself, and now, in verity, it sounded on the stairs. Slowly, majestically, as determined as ever, Mrs. Pinchin descended, her slow eyes burning with a suppressed yet vital fire, her jaw squared, and decision written in every line of her grim and iron features. She and the girl met in the hallway, Mrs. Pinchin repressed and masterful, Corrie fearful and guiltily embarrassed.

"You ordered my carriage for ten?" inquired Mrs. Pinchin with an inflection that suggested no possible doubt.

Corrie in confusion remembered she had forgotten. "Oh — why, no!" she stammered.

Mrs. Pinchin's eyes slowly fastened on hers. "You forgot? Did n't I instruct you to do it?" she demanded harshly. "Look here now; what's gotten into you lately?"

Then Corrie's dignity came to her aid. "Nothing has gotten into me, Mrs. Pinchin," she answered quietly. "I forgot — that is all."

Then at the girl's steadfast look, the dull, heavy-lidded eyes shifted, and Mrs. Pinchin drew in her breath, a sigh almost of weariness. "Well, call up

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the stable now," she said in an altered tone, as if tired of contention, and willing to sue for peace at any cost. "Remember, please, you 're to go with me. Don't forget that."

An objection leaped to Corrie's lips; she remembered whom she had promised to meet at the Park entrance. "But I —" she had begun, when Mrs. Pinchin wheeled on her ponderously.

"But you — well — what?"

Corrie, without answering, walked through the dining room, and on into the pantry. There seemed little to be gained in rekindling the latent flame in the breast of that grim and moody personage, to rekindle the tinder of her wrath. Yet the moment was only delayed; for Corrie, with a new and greater reason than all others to encourage her, had decided to dispute Mrs. Pinchin's power. No, she would not drive with her to-day — perhaps she would never drive with her again. Down the hall she heard the door close noisily as Mrs. Pinchin mured herself in her den, and then the house relapsed into its accustomed stillness. But, as Corrie climbed the stairs to her room, another sound reached her ears in that quietness, a sound that warned her the climax of the morning's tragic circumstance still worked its effect. Miss Maria's door was closed, yet from within came a thin and small, keen, gagging whisper, a sobbing insistently fearful as of a child crying its terror of the dark.

It was Miss Maria who wept, choking, as if she strove to silence herself.

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Once she regained her room, a glance at the clock warned Corrie she would have no time for her interrupted packing. In less than a half hour she must be at the Park entrance, and at the thought of it, with a girlish consciousness, she glanced at herself swiftly in the mirror. The glance, brief as it was, awakened other glances directed at herself, — a critical survey of her appearance. They were almost unhappy, dissatisfied glances, too, and with a sigh, she looked toward the wardrobe, realizing it held nothing better to wear than the dress she was then arrayed in. But Corrie was not one long to nurse discontent for something that could not be bettered, and a moment later, with her accustomed animation, she was making ready for the street.

Downstairs in the hall, the tall, garish wall clock sounded its peal of chimes — a quarter of ten — time to be flitting now. Straightening her hat before the glass, she picked up her jacket, and once more as on the day before, tiptoed to the stairs. Below, the house maintained its quiet; there was no longer even that whisper of sobbing from the room below; and the only sound the girl could detect was from outside — the distant, deadened murmur of the city's street noises, echoing like the voice of a never stilled sea. But as Corrie leaned over the balustrade, waiting to make sure, her brows drew together in a sudden little frown. Why should she go like this, stealthy and creeping — and what would *he* think of her — as if she were a thief in the night? In that moment's reflection it seemed to her there had been too many of

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these undignified exits — too much of this craftiness. Shame touched her face with its flaming finger, and nerved by that stress of self-scorn, she tucked her jacket firmly under her arm, and thereupon marched down the broad stairway of Mrs. Pinchin's with all the majesty and determination Mrs. Pinchin herself might have assumed. Past Miss Maria's door she tramped, down the last flight to the drawing-room floor and with her head held proudly erect, Corrie was advancing toward the street door when there arose directly in her path, the massive, portentous bulk of the very one whom the girl had meant to defy.

Mrs. Pinchin had come noiselessly out of her secret closet. Under one arm was tucked a portly bundle of documents tied around with tape, and at the sight of Corrie, she made an involuntary movement, as if to retreat within the room; then changing her mind, she advanced along the hallway, her eyes fixed distrustfully on her companion. "Where are you going? The carriage is n't ready yet," she said, her thick brows meeting in her frown.

"No, I know," answered Corrie. "I'm going out for a moment, though."

Through many years of persistent oppression, Mrs. Pinchin had unconsciously done her best to instruct Corrie in all the arts of evasion, concealment, deceit. But one would have thought now that Corrie had profited little by the lessons; for at the very moment when deceit would have proved of the best advantage to the pupil, Corrie faced her able instruc-

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tor with the truth. "I'm going out," she said, and perhaps there was a reason why Mrs. Pinchin should show her immediate astonishment.

"You're going out?" she repeated. "What are you going out for? And who told you, now, you could go?"

"No one told me. I am going out on an errand for myself."

"An errand for yourself?" There was a sing-song cadence of mockery in Mrs. Pinchin's voice that denoted the wrath rising apace with her contempt. "What kind of an errand for yourself?"

Corrie moved as if to pass Mrs. Pinchin without further parleying. But there was an explanation still to be made, and Mrs. Pinchin showed no willingness to forego it. "Stop!" she said in a low warning voice, and with that planted her cane against the wall to bar Corrie's way. "Stop! Now let's have an explanation of these doings."

"I tell you I have an errand, Mrs. Pinchin," said Corrie, her eyes unwavering, though her face had blanched. "I'll return in a few minutes."

"You'll return in a few minutes," mimicked Mrs. Pinchin, baring her teeth. "You'll do nothing of the kind. You'll go to your room and stay until I see fit to send for you." In fierce emphasis of the words she wagged her head from side to side, and followed this with a commanding gesture of her stick. "Come — do as I tell you. What are you gaping at?"

"At you!" cried Corrie, sharply and swiftly.

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“Last night you promised to treat me as I should be treated — as I insist I shall be treated, Mrs. Pinchin. I am no longer a child, I tell you. You shall not keep me in this house as if I were a prisoner! Now please let me get by.”

“Oh! — so that’s it, is it?” answered Mrs. Pinchin in an even, regulated voice. She leaned back a little as if better to inspect the girl; and then with a sudden access of anger, all the pent-up, raging, hidden emotion in her soul, the repressed and tragic passion that stirred her, flashed up into Mrs. Pinchin’s face, and she turned on Corrie flaming as with the signal of open war.

“Stop!” Mrs. Pinchin in emphasis prodded the wall with her cane. “You dare defy me like that?” she cried in a voice shrilly tense with wrath. “You think to ride me down — huh! a chit like you? — Oh!” she cried, “you think that because I gave you a bit of soft soap last night — because I tried to make it easier for you — yes, and for *me!* — you think you can gallop over me rough shod. Do you know why I was kind to you? — why I truckled with you, and begged you to stay here and be happy — and contented — and satisfied? No — oh, no you don’t! You thought it was because I was frightened — that maybe there was something I was trying to hide. Yes — and that’s what I get for bothering my head about you. Oh, go ahead, Miss Sly Boots! Snoop around and prowl and find out what you like. But when you’ve found out, don’t you come crying back to me. No, don’t you dare, for I’ll have washed my

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hands of you then. But you mark my words!" She leaned toward the quivering girl, and wagged a thick, bony finger in her face. "You mark my words! When you've found out what you're trying to learn, you'll wish to go and hide your head in darkness! You'll wish you never lived to see the day!"

As the last words quit her lips, Mrs. Pinchin drew in her breath with a strong, gasping sigh, again almost of the thickness of a sob; and all her shrewlike rage seeming to drain itself away, she leaned back and stared at Corrie solemnly, almost with absorbing pity.

"Come, you must go to your room, child," she murmured, quieted as if by her weariness of the dispute; "you are too young to understand a thing like this. But some day it will be clear to you. Come — obey me now!"

There was a hidden significance in the words so urgent and even appealing that Corrie was almost shocked into obedience. For what was it that Mrs. Pinchin strove to conceal? In her tone was a depth of regret and trying sadness Corrie had never heard before — as if she strove painfully, not for herself, but, instead, for one who seemed determined to plunge on wilfully into the abyss from which she was trying so hard to save her. The girl shook with a quick, returning dread. Was it a warning that some unspoken blight lay behind the secret that wrapped her life in mystery? Yet why should she fear even that? If indeed so, was the shame hers? Mrs. Pinchin no

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doubt read the struggle going on in Corrie's mind, for she hastened to follow up her advantage.

"Some day you shall understand; it shall be clear to you then. But now, my girl, now — be careful! — be very careful! Be guided by me, and in the end, it shall be all right — yes — perhaps."

The veiled meaning stung the girl into speech. "It shall never be all right till I *know!*" she cried miserably. "You say some day I shall. Then tell me *now*, Mrs. Pinchin — tell me! I can gain nothing by waiting." She paused and gazed intently at the dark, brooding face as if trying to read the secret there, and then she shook her head. "No, I see you have no intention of telling me. Is it because you dare not tell me the truth? Is it because you dare not for my sake — or is it, tell me, because you dare not for — for your own sake? Tell me that, Mrs. Pinchin."

A sharp twinge, as if of pain, convulsed Mrs. Pinchin's face. She drew in her breath sharply, sighing as if she had been struck a vital blow. "Oh!" she gasped, her face distorted, "oh — —"

But whether it was sorrow or wrath that moved her, Corrie was not to learn. A noise at the door interrupted; someone stood in the vestibule, trying to get in, and peering through the lace curtain drawn across the glass. Then leaving the door, the person sprang to the doorbell, and while the two stood watching, he rang, and the lower regions of the house were filled with the clamor of that signal, — prolonged, energetic, and imperative.

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It was Mr. Stanton again. Mrs. Pinchin, forgetful of all, even Corrie, seemed suddenly conscious of the papers under her arm. Stooping laboriously, she made an effort to shove them beneath the hall settee, and this failing, she hobbled along the passage as fast as her stick could aid her. "Stay where you are!" she ordered in a voice again filled with forcible warning; and reaching her room, in a perfect stampede of haste, she unlocked the door, tossed the papers inside, helter-skelter, and turned the key in the lock. Then she turned, just in time to head off Maggie at the basement stairs. "Stay at your work, girl. I'll open the door."

Corrie, half way down the hall, still waited, nonplussed at Mrs. Pinchin's alarmed excitement. "If you don't go to your room, I'll — "

The remainder of the sentence, obviously a warning, was left unsaid, as Mrs. Pinchin turned the doorknob in answer to another peal of the bell. Instantly the door moved, Mr. Stanton showed himself, his face lighting eagerly as he saw who let him in; and before Mrs. Pinchin could restrain him, he began energetically pouring out a string of questions. Haste, or rather an un-Chesterfieldian hurry seemed to have robbed Mr. Stanton of his usual nonchalance and aplomb; for once he was as unrepressed and animated as the most vulgar of the vulgar herd. "Have you seen it? Do you know what 's happened? Has anyone told you — ?"

"Hush!" exclaimed Mrs. Pinchin. Clutching her visitor by the sleeve, and with another sharp look at

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the girl, she led Mr. Stanton into the seclusion of the darkened drawing-room. A murmur of voices followed, restrained yet filled with a tense excitement. The words were unintelligible, but Corrie made no attempt to listen. She turned toward the stair, as if, at the last, to obey; then biting her lip, she swung on her heel and went boldly down the hall. No voice challenged from the drawing-room; the murmur of talk went on unchecked; and reaching the door, she flung it open, and every moment expecting to hear Mrs. Pinchin bellowing after her, sped down to the street. There, heading toward the Park, she hurried away, and a moment later, almost breathlessly turned the corner.

In the words of Mr. Stanton, the bird, indeed, had flitted — had flown from its gilded nest!

No one pursued. Crossing the broad avenue to the walk beside the Park, she reduced her pace to a more leisurely gait, her eyes fixed on the distant entrance. Overhead, the spring sun had climbed to a cloudless height, and the day momentarily grew warmer and more alluring. Corrie drew in her breath with a sigh of relief. Over the low parapet that walls the Park, her eye wandered along the sweep of broad lawns, brilliant in their vernal greens, and rested on the mazes of shrubbery, now just beginning to color with awakening life. An early May-day party, crowding the season, romped along the nearest turf, and the air was filled with the gay treble of childish voices, shouting gleefully as they caught a flash of silver where the lake revealed itself through

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the lattice of budding twigs. A bridle path wound among the trees beneath the hill, and, as Corrie looked, a group of equestrians cantered into view; a slender girl of Corrie's own age mounted on a tall, upstanding bay, and two young men; one on a square, broad-gaited cob, the other on a lean, racy chestnut, whose coat gleamed silkily in the shafts of light pouring through the arched branches above. As the three reached the turn to the long, gentle slope that leads up to the archway under the drive, the girl gave her bay his head, and with a gay cry and a challenging wave of her hand, dashed out in the lead, her trim figure swaying itself to the long, burning stride of her mount. Away they went, the girl's laughter sounding above the scurry of hoofs, the two lads following, each with his head bent over his horse's neck and an arm upraised to shield off the hail of loam thrown up by the slashing heels in front. A mounted policeman at the crest raised a reproving finger, and dragging down her mount to an easy hand-canter the girl passed on out of sight, an echo of her high-spirited merriment drifting back long after she had disappeared from view.

Corrie gently sighed. A longing that she, too, might share a little of such care-free, young and wholesome existence stole like a shadow over her heart — a little pang of envy that was not to be stilled. But joy and freedom and the liberty of high spirits had been denied to her as all else had been denied — even as she had been denied a child's privilege of childhood. There was no conscious self-pity in

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the thought, only the growing pang of resentment that so much had been taken from her.

There were few in the Park as yet, only the morning's vanguard that later would swell into a glittering, varied throng of idlers. Along the paths lagged the inevitable mob of nursemaids and their charges, or, choosing a sunny bench, they sat and gossiped shrilly; and mixed in among them were the other early stragglers, the every-day assortment that drift in of a morning; the old and the young, the respectable and the unclassed, the washed and the unwashed — a park crowd in all its incongruous makeup of types and kinds and classes. There were the usual early morning old gentlemen cheerfully taking the prescribed constitutional, or sunning themselves on the benches; the usual procession of spring-time convalescents, limping or led or wheeled along; the usual array of night birds slouched down in their seats, with one hazy eye cast slyly in the direction of the nearest policeman. Then, too, there were the habitual couples sheepishly conscious of themselves and hurriedly seeking unfrequented nooks; the wonted parade of spiritless men leading — or being led — by their wives' more cherished pets — poodles, spaniels, black and tans, Yorkshires, Skyes and what nots; so forth and so on. One found them all in that early morning crowd, and the procession that flowed up and down the paths, and in and out at the entrances was as variegated and picturesque in its assembly, as absorbed and as absorbing, as only a New York may provide. Along the driveways pa-

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raded the other part of it; the buggies, runabouts, tilburys, mailwagons and dogcarts; the Hempstead carts with something horsey in the shafts; the occasional brougham with its shutters down and the coachman in undress whipcords — or, if the shades were up and its driver in livery, one saw something pampered lying back among the cushions and peevishly braving the air. Motor cars of every known kind and description roared their way in and out among the other vehicles, nearly all bound southward to the city, and then, as if the world were to omit nothing from the display, came an occasional lone and solitary bicycle perilously threading its way among the traffic.

As Corrie reached the Park entrance she halted a moment and gazed expectantly down the broad stretch of Seventy-second Street toward the Elevated, where Columbus Avenue with its surface cars, its wagons, and the sidewalks crowded with early morning patrons of the shops, flowed past like the glimpse of a lively stream. A train had just pulled in at the uptown station, and already its passengers, reaching the street, were beginning to disperse in different directions. But neither among them nor among the others heading for the Park was the tall, alert figure she looked for. Realizing she was ahead of time, and perhaps a little conscious of her eagerness, she walked past the entrance without turning in, intending to dawdle away the few remaining minutes before he came. It may have been well that she did so — yet why? At all events, as she swung about to

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retrace her steps, a light brougham drawn by a pair of antique roans rattled across the car tracks in front of the Park entrance, and hobbled away down the drive. It was Mrs. Pinchin's carriage, and as it flashed by in the distance, Corrie had an instant's view of a massive, stalwart frame reclining among the cushions — of a large, dark, heavy face intently peering ahead.

The girl was still staring after this vision, when she was aware of a young man in tweeds hurriedly crossing the avenue. He, too, was staring after the carriage, having seen who sat inside, but once the carriage had disappeared he turned, and with a smile came hurrying toward her.

"Have I kept you waiting?" he asked, his eyes brightening with frank admiration as he looked at her. "My!" he exclaimed, "I'm hardly able to recognize you when you're away from Mrs. Pinchin's. You look so different."

"Indeed!" remarked Corrie, coloring faintly, though not in the least displeased.

He caught the little flush, and at once became humble. "Oh, please! I hope you're not vexed with me?" He looked at her closely as if to make sure she was n't, and Corrie frowned severely. "I mean you're dressed differently, and you have on a hat. Then, besides, your hair is n't so — oh, you can go ahead and laugh, if you like. But it's true!"

"I'm not laughing!" protested Corrie, stoutly, blushing again; "I was just wondering what else

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you 'd discovered about me. Do all young men pay such close attention to the young women they happen to know? "

" Some do," he answered promptly and impressively; " particularly when —— "

" When what? " demanded Corrie, unconsciously, " when they have on a hat? "

" Such a pretty hat," he corrected, glancing at her toque.

" Just fancy! Well, I made the hat myself. And I made my dress, too, if you 'd like to know."

" Perfectly splendid! " he declared admiringly; though instead of looking at her dress, he stole another glance at the girl's eyes and at her face, sparkling with animation. " And I should say, too, that you did up your own hair this morning, if you 'll allow me."

" Mercy! what 's wrong with it? " exclaimed Corrie, hastily feeling whether any of the soft wisps had fallen out of place.

" Wrong! Why, on the contrary, I think it 's just —— "

" Shall we go into the Park? " interrupted Corrie, hurriedly. " It 's very nice in there in the morning. I always take my walks here, alone usually, though sometimes —— "

" Oh! " inquiringly.

" Sometimes, Mr. Geikie, I wander here with another, " laughed Corrie, provokingly. " I rarely lack company, you know."

" No, I suppose not! " he responded without en-

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thusiasm. "There are always a lot of lucky duffers who can get off every morning, if they choose."

Corrie laughed at him openly. "You 'd better not let Mrs. Pinchin or Miss Maria hear you say that," she warned. "They might object to being termed lucky duffers."

"Mrs. Pinchin — or Miss Maria? I did n't mention either. I meant the chaps who go out walking with you. They 're the ones."

She smiled lightly at the suggestion. "You 're the only one I 've ever walked with, Mr. Geikie," said Corrie, shaking her head; "under ordinary circumstances, I come here with Miss Maria, or, on occasion, with Mrs. Pinchin herself. You see, I don't know any young men; you 're the only one I 've ever met."

He looked at her in astonishment. "Do you really mean that? Why, where have you lived all your life — in a nunnery?"

"No — I 've lived at Mrs. Pinchin's," she answered quietly, certain, at all events, that to herself it explained everything. "But don't let 's talk about that," she murmured, with a little frown. "Can't we be serious?"

They had entered the Park during this momentary conversation. Reaching the drive, they crossed northward past that amazing example of the foundry molder's art, the bulk of metal that may be a statue, but is certainly not, as alleged, the statue of Daniel Webster. It upreared itself there in an attitude as if it had just asked alms of the passing

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throng, and had been haughtily refused, its posture all the more affecting because of the nest some sparrow had built in its nerveless fingers. But beyond this foundry exhibit was something more natural — more like nature — winding paths that led unexpectedly into quiet, unfrequented nooks; little hills and vales, lone and secluded, stretches of shadowy thickets and treeland that were almost like a bit of countryside. Until they reached this quiet, they seemed anxious to avoid the topic that had brought them together this morning; but once they were alone — alone, if one omitted the few stragglers drifting aimlessly along the paths — he turned to her suddenly. "Now please tell me what happened to you — about Mrs. Pinchin, I mean. You said it was dreadful."

Corrie thoughtfully lowered her eyes; for the moment, she made no answer. "What is it?" he asked, her puckered brow telling him that something troub-
lous lay on her mind. "Is there any reason why you don't like to tell what has happened?"

She nodded slowly. "Yes." She thought a moment longer, and then turned to him impulsively. "Please don't think me stupid — foolish — or anything like that. But I wish you would tell me this: Is it right for me to tell what goes on in that house? I wish you 'd tell me frankly. You know," she cried, with a little regretful laugh, "I 've never had anyone to guide me — to tell me what is right and wrong in a puzzle like this. I wish to tell you everything; I know I can trust you; but still Mrs. Pinchin's house

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is my home, such as it is, and its secrets seem hardly the thing to talk about. Won't you tell me what I should do?"

He shook his head. "I confess I don't know," he said quietly. "You must n't tell me anything that will hurt you to tell. I wished to know what had happened, only because of the hope that I might help you. I think I could, too, if you would let me."

A little tremor shook Corrie. "I know you would," she answered softly; "you seem to be the only friend I've ever had. Do you really wish to know about Mrs. Pinchin? Shall I tell you why I tried to find out something about her from you and your mother and uncle? Do you really wish to know?"

Again he shook his head. "No, not if it would pain you to tell me. And besides —"

"Besides — what?" she prompted, when he faltered.

"Well," he responded softly, "I know — or, rather, I have guessed why you have tried to find out."

The color crept slowly into Corrie's face, and then as slowly faded away. "You say you know?"

"Yes. How could I help guessing it, when I've thought of it so much. You told me enough, yesterday, to let me understand." Then he caught sight of the cloud in the girl's eyes. "I am so sorry," he whispered softly.

Corrie looked up at him, her face composed again, though the old, shadowy, wistful expression still lingered in her eyes. "Yes, you have guessed it," she

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murmured. "I *was* trying to find out about myself — not who Mrs. Pinchin is. I was trying not only to find that out, but more — not only *who* I am, but — well, even more than that. I have been trying for years, — ever since I was a little girl."

Then she turned away, her eyes misty, fearful lest he see her emotion. But he did see it, and straightway, with a ready sympathy, did his best to comfort her. "You must n't feel that way about it," he remonstrated cheerfully. "I'm sure we're going to straighten it out."

Driving back her emotion, Corrie looked up again with a smile. "Well, you know now," she said quietly, "and now that I've told you, what do you think of it?"

"Poor little girl!" he whispered.

In a few moments, they had left the peopled quarter of the Park behind, and now were really and wholly alone, hedged in by walls of shrubbery, and with only an impertinent, scampering squirrel for company, and the birds who mated there, together forgetful of the city that lay so close beyond. Corrie was the first to speak again.

"I wish to tell you everything," she said simply, "because somehow I feel that you are one in whom I can really confide. I've never had anyone before, you know."

So quietly she gave him the story, nothing omitted, all her secret revealed. She told him of all her childhood at Mrs. Pinchin's, of Mrs. Pinchin's oppression, and of the cruelty of that moment when Mrs. Pinchin,

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in her cold anger and contempt, had dubbed her with a name, choosing it outlandishly from the vulgar term — Brown, Smith, and Robinson. She told him, too, of the nights when she had sat up in bed in the dark, crying *Corrie Who?* and, afterward, *Corrie What?* All this she repeated simply, unreservedly, and without affectation; and the boy's face reflected her own trouble that came with the bitter memories. "Oh!" he exclaimed, shocked, when Corrie came to the part where Mrs. Pinchin had held the child between her knees and rapped out the threat: — "Your father, hey?" *Rap! tap!* — a bailiff's double knock. "You'd better not speak of your father!" *Rap! tap!* "Oh!" he exclaimed, flushing painfully. Corrie went on, undeterred.

"No, I mean to tell you everything!" she declared. So word by word, deed by deed, scene by scene, the whole story poured from her, all of it down to the time when, filled with her trouble, she had begun her guileless effort to unravel the tangle unaided. "It was really you who gave me the first hint," she added thankfully. "You told me of the house down there in that out-of-the-way corner of the city. And if it hadn't been for you, I might never have found it."

But the remembrance scarcely pleased him. "Don't! I wish you would n't speak of that!" he protested sharply. "I did n't dream that this was serious. I hope you 'll forgive me for that bungling business — sending you to my mother's house."

"If you had n't, perhaps I should never have

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learned anything. Now there seems to be a chance of finding it out."

He looked at her closely. "Have n't you a guess, yet?" he asked cautiously. "I mean, have n't you thought who Mrs. Pinchin may be — and about the Tollabees — and what Mrs. Pinchin may be to you?"

She shook her head. "No, I have n't guessed anything. But I believe when Mrs. Pinchin's real identity is known, I shall learn something about myself. Of that I am convinced, though I can guess nothing more."

He was still watching her intently. "Listen, Corrie," he began, and then flushed awkwardly. "I mean, Miss Robinson — — —"

"No, don't — not that. I detest the sound of it, and I don't mind the other in the least. It sounds friendly — and you are my friend, aren't you?" She smiled, and then, as if to stay the impulsive words that seemed hovering on his lips, she laid a hand on his arm. "You are the only friend I know," she said simply, "and I hope you will always remain one."

But at the light in his eyes, Corrie's color came again, and she walked on a little faster.

"Now," said Corrie, slowing down a little, "let's be just plain matter-of-fact. You have n't told me about the advertisement yet."

"No, I have n't," he admitted candidly. "I rather hoped you 'd wait until I found out something. Then, if you 'll be really, truly good, I may tell you something," he laughed.

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“Oh, indeed!” Corrie wrinkled her brow again. “I don’t see any reason why you should laugh about it, though. Aren’t you going to tell me everything now, or are you going to be just as hateful as Mrs. Pinchin?”

He laughed again at her gaily. “Just wait — that’s all.”

“But how are you going to find out about the advertisement, anyway?” she demanded.

“How? Why, in the simplest way imaginable. I’ve answered it.”

“You’ve answered it!” Corrie cried out in astonishment. “How in the world did you ever think of doing that?”

Still again he laughed. “Doesn’t anyone ever answer advertisements, simple?” he inquired provokingly.

“Well, how should I know — and besides, you sha’ n’t call me simple, either. I just wished to know how you came to do such an unheard-of thing.”

“All by myself, of course,” he answered, amused at her earnestness. “I suppose Uncle Phil would be tearing angry if he heard about it, because last night he took the pains to warn me to keep my hands off this business. I think they know something they don’t dare repeat; at all events, it looks as if they were busy guessing, and growing all the more scared at every guess. This morning I showed the advertisement to Uncle Phil, and he nearly jumped down my throat. He warned me again to keep my hands out of it, or there’d be trouble. But

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that didn't keep me from trying to find out. I wrote to this *Earnest*, whoever he may be, and told him that if he'd communicate with me, he might hear something to his advantage."

"But what are you going to tell him when he appears? Do you know anything about the Tollabees?"

"Tell him?" echoed Phil, "why I'm going to tell him nothing at all. But that won't prevent me from making a lively effort to find out what he's after, you may be sure. I won't open my mouth until he lets out what he's after."

Corrie was frowning at him severely. "I never heard of such duplicity!" she cried. "Do you think it right? I don't!"

"Oh, you don't say so!" he laughed. "That's a nice thing to tell me, particularly when I'm doing it only for your sake."

"If that's the case, I have a good mind to say you sha'n't do it."

"Oh, well," he answered, twinkling at her, "if you feel that way about it, I won't play any tricks on him. The fact of the matter is that I really know very little about the Tollabees. I know that Randolph Tollabee is dead; so is his wife, too. And that's about all."

"Why, was he married?" exclaimed Corrie. "Why, of course! — now that I stop to think about it, he must have been."

A sudden thought struck her, a flash of illuminating light, something that confirmed the hazy thought that long had drifted through her mind.

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“Tell me,” she pleaded swiftly, “did Randolph Tollabee leave a child? Can you tell me that?”

Phil, as if trying to dissemble, did his best to look blankly at the distance. “I really don’t know,” he answered slowly. “If you care to know, that’s what I’m trying to find out.”

“Oh!” — and after that *Oh!* Corrie fell silently into thought.

They had reached the crest of a little hill where the path wound downward to a quiet stream arched by a narrow, rustic bridge. As they reached it, they paused and leaned over the hand rail, absorbed in themselves, and glad of the quiet and loneliness of that hidden spot.

“There’s one thing more I’d like to know,” said Corrie, after a pause. “Have you ever heard the name of — I mean, will you tell me the name of Randolph Tollabee’s wife? You remember it, don’t you?”

“Yes, I recall it. I overheard mother and Uncle Phil talking about her last night. She was a young Frenchwoman — Leonie Giraud.”

“Leonie — Leonie Giraud!” Corrie repeated the name softly, murmuring it again, not as if trying to recall it, for she had never heard it before; but as if she must remember it always in the future.

“Have n’t you ever heard it before?” he asked; for once the name had left his lips he had looked at her sharply, as if trying to learn whether she had ever heard it. But Corrie had never heard it before, as he saw. “No, of course you would n’t remember

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it," he said. " You could n't recall the name any more than you should know my Uncle Stanwood married a Tollabee. In fact, if you did n't know one fact, it is n't likely you 'd know the other. But still," he added scornfully, " it 's a question whether Uncle Stanwood ever did marry."

Corrie looked at him vaguely.

" It is n't a very pleasant thing to talk about," he answered dubiously. " It 's just this: Uncle Stanwood seems to have tricked Margaret Tollabee in the same way he tricked everyone else who was unfortunate enough to trust him. No one knows to this day whether he really married her or not. I understand he has even denied it. But I say!" he cried, changing the subject abruptly, as if eager to get away from it, " It did stir up the family when I told mother and uncle about the photograph album — the one you have stowed away in the garret."

" Did it? I don't see why," answered Corrie idly, much too absorbed with the one sweet echo ringing through her mind to pay heed to anything else — the echo of the name, alluring in its euphony — Leonie Giraud, the dead young wife of Randolph Tollabee. *Leonie Giraud!*

" What pictures are in your album? " he asked, with an assumed carelessness; too careless, perhaps, to have deceived anyone but the absorbed girl. " About the usual kind, I take it, are n't they? " he suggested laughingly. " You know the kind I mean, don't you, — the kind they always drag out to bore still further the evening's bored visitors — pictures

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of elderly gentlemen posing at marble-topped tables — draped curtain behind — hand in coat breast — and scowling as if they were determined to look pleasant? Is n't that it — and along with these, a few middle-aged females with corkscrew curls — first cousins twice removed? Most of them look as if they ought to be removed altogether."

Corrie laughed lightly at the description. "No — not all, I should say." In a few words she described the faces in the album, sobering as she told of the picture of that dark-eyed woman, the softness of whose dark eyes and quiet smile still shone unobscured from the faded, yellowing print. Who was she? And the thought brought its answering thought — a question, yet perhaps the truth — Leonie Giraud?

"But you 've left out the young ones, have n't you?" suggested Phil, smilingly, when Corrie had finished her description. "Are n't there young hopefuls in the album — the darling prides of the family? There must be a lot of those, of course."

Corrie told him no; there was only one picture of a child — the child held in the arms of the tall, grave man in mourning. Phil listened alertly, while Corrie told of it.

But all this was fated to come to a sudden and, to her, utterly unexpected end. "Do you know," he said urgently, "my mother and Uncle Phil wish to see that book of yours. Can't you take it to them this afternoon?"

Corrie thought for a moment. "I 'd like to do it to-day," she answered, after a moment's reflection;

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“but I can’t get away this afternoon. Would to-morrow do? I shall be free then.”

For there had come to her the swift remembrance that on the morrow she would be free of Mrs. Pinchin — free from the imprisonment of that house. Once she had left Mrs. Pinchin’s she would be her own mistress, free and unfettered, privileged to go and come as she liked. But on top of this came still another thought. “But does your mother wish to see me?” she asked simply. “Has she forgiven me? Perhaps I should n’t go to see her until she herself has asked me.”

“Oh, nonsense!” he declared. “Mother is very anxious to see you. Why can’t you come to-day, as well as to-morrow? Can’t you get away from Mrs. Pinchin?”

“No, not to-day,” answered Corrie, and looked at him to see what he’d think when she told him. “But to-morrow, Mrs. Pinchin won’t have anything to say about it.”

Phil looked at her, puzzled. “Why, is she going away?” he asked.

“No, but I am,” answered Corrie, clearly. “I’m going to leave Mrs. Pinchin. I can’t stay there any longer.”

But at the look of dismay in his face she laid a restraining hand on his arm. “You don’t understand. Yes, I am going to leave her,” she said with a quiet dignity. “I cannot tell you what she has said and done; but it is impossible for me to go on living in that house. I must find some other place.”

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He hardly waited for her to finish. "But you must n't do that, Corrie!" he cried energetically. "You can't leave there until you have found another place to live. You must n't think of it!" he cried vehemently. "I can't let you do anything like that."

"But I must. I shall," she insisted gently. "I shall find something to do; there will be some way for me to get along. It is n't so very dreadful, after all. Many other girls have done it."

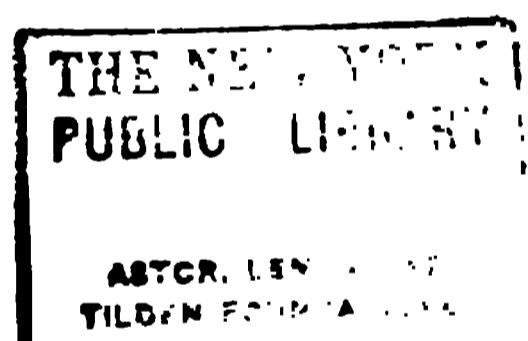
"Yes, and many have ——" He broke off helplessly; the idea of a girl as young and innocent as she was, trying to get on, alone and unaided, in a place like New York, filled him with dismay. The thought reduced him to arguments he dared not utter to her; in all probability, she would not even have understood them.

But Corrie seemed determined. "I have my music," she said, filled with innocent courage, all the more affecting to him because of its innocence. "That will support me."

He still stared at her, disconcerted and dismayed. A girl like that alone and unprotected. "No, you can't do it," he said determinedly. "It's impossible, I tell you. Oh, see here, Corrie, you must promise me you won't do anything like that. I can't prevent you, of course; but is n't there anything to make you change your mind? Go back to Mrs. Pinchin's, won't you?" he pleaded earnestly, "and stay there a while. It won't be for long, I'm sure. Corrie, promise me, won't you?"



**Then, before she had dreamed of it, her face turned itself up
to his, her eyes suffused with tears.**



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His hand slipped along the railing of the bridge and gripped hers tightly. She thrilled at the touch. "You'll promise me, won't you, dear, dear little girl?" he whispered, his voice urgent and masterful; and with the woman's love of being led and controlled, she thrilled, too, at that. "Don't you see what it means to me?" he asked, looking down at her, his face filled with concern.

Again the color crept into her cheeks, burning a moment, only to fade away. She dared not look up at him, for she was trembling, dreading to let him see the answering emotion in her own eyes. "Look up at me! Promise now!" he persisted, and then his arm drew her to him. "Will you promise?"

Her courage gave way there. She dared not look at him, indeed, or, still less, to trust herself to speak. But he would not be denied. "I am waiting," he said. "You cannot go until you promise me."

"Yes — I promise!" she whispered faintly. "But — oh! why do you make me?"

Then, before she had dreamed of it, her face turned itself up to his, her eyes suffused with tears, and she was lying in his arms — white, quivering, unable — numbly waiting the moment when his lips, hovering above hers, should claim what they sought. "Corrie!" he murmured, "my dear little girl." He bent closer, and at the whispered name, her heart again throbbed its answer to his. "Corrie!" — and then, as if at an awakening call, she realized.

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**“No, no! you shall not!” she cried, distressed.
“No —”**

Instantly he released her. “I won’t ask you to forgive me,” he said clearly. “I could not help it, and I am not in the least sorry.”

CHAPTER XI

Relating how Corrie analyzed her own condition. — The girl in the phaeton. — How even love may add to sadness. — Miss Maria's departure. — Enter Miss Freedlark, the Sapphic poetess. — The art and practice of getting into print. — Miss Freedlark's eagerness to exchange Fame for mere bread and butter. — The letter from Phil's mother.

THE moment passed, a long moment before Corrie dared to trust herself to speak, much less to look at him. The tide of color surged into her face and paled away as soon, flashing intermittently with her emotions. "How *dared* you?" she asked in a tense whisper, but even that did not dismay him.

"I could n't help it," he repeated quietly, "and I am not sorry."

With her head stiffly erect, the girl turned back along the way they had come. She still maintained her reserve, her eyes filled with the tears of regret, perhaps anger, that she allowed herself to be so carried away in that instant of revealing weakness. To surrender like that to anyone! To reveal herself to him even before she was asked! She cried out to herself at the thought of it, scourged by self-disparagement. Even the reminder that he had been equally guilty could not repress her scorn. She could have cried out to him, as she cried to herself now, "I hate you!" But she did not.

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Before long her silence oppressed him too. "I don't ask you to forgive me," he said gently. "I don't think there is anything to forgive; I could not help it if I had tried. Won't you look up at me?"

Silence. She kept her eyes on the ground, unanswering. They walked a little further; then he spoke suddenly, as in a flow of irritation at her silence. "You won't speak to me — what shall I do, then? Shall I tell you I'm sorry — that I didn't mean it? Shall I tell you that?"

There she looked up swiftly, and her eyes filled with fire, gleaming behind her tears. "If you dared," she cried passionately, "I'd never speak to you again — never, never look at you!"

"Well, don't fear. I have n't the slightest idea of doing it. That's just what I wished to hear you say."

Poor Corrie! Knowing what that passionate answer had revealed, she could have bitten out her tongue for saying it. "I think you're hateful — hateful!" she cried, her vehemence twofold, once she had looked up and caught the smile lurking in his eyes.

"Corrie — oh, Corrie!"

"No! You shall not call me that. I forbid you!" She snatched away the hand he tried to take; and then aware that her anger and resentment were still further betraying her depth of feeling, she nerved herself into an icy coldness.

The sudden change utterly disconcerted him. "Oh, please, won't you — please now!" he pleaded,

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filled with a boyish anxiety; but Corrie, once offended, was not easily to be pleaded with.

"You must say no more about it," she declared, her words crisply cold; "no — not if we are still to be friends." One would have thought from her dignity that a woman of middle age was speaking, not this slip of a girl who relied only on a vague, indeterminate instinct, a kind of inherent tact, to lead her, otherwise unguided, through the difficult paths of life.

"Very well, then," he answered, restrained, too, now that he saw she was genuinely vexed. "I'll remain, as you say, a friend. But that will not prevent me from being, sometime — some day — more than that. But until this is settled, until we've found out what you wish to know, I'll be just a friend, — just the friend you say." He smiled again as he said it, but there was no smile on Corrie's lips, or in her heart any desire to smile. "After that — well." He was looking at her intently now. "Little girl," he added softly, "it does n't make any difference what we find out. It will be — just the same."

She heard, but gave no heed to it. They had come to the drive again, the path winding along beside the lake, and at their right the broad roadway swinging southward under its arch of trees. At the turn the uncouth, ugly statue stood with its back turned as if utterly dejected now, and Corrie, staring at it dully, was just starting to cross the roadway when a smart clatter of hoofs sounded on the air.

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At the crest of the hill a phaeton drawn by a lively pair of grays hove into view. Its broad dash and varnished guards gleamed in the bright sunshine, and as the trap bore on down the slope, there was a play of sunlight, too, on the points of its silver-mounted harness, and a gleam of satiny coats, as the matched pair forged along at their work. A girl drove, a young woman in a jacket and sailor straw, and by the way she managed the lively grays, her hands confidently feeling the bits as they leaned up against the collars, one saw she knew what she was about, and that the groom, who sat looking on from the rumble, was there for form's sake only.

Corrie looked up in interest as this animated picture shot into sight. And Phil — Phil looked, too, and then started consciously. The involuntary movement took his hand toward his hat, and the young woman, attracted by the gesture, turned to see who it was. Instantly her whip hand reached over and gripped the lines as if to pull up; and she had already recognized him, when she saw he was not alone. It was all brief, momentary; the grays had hardly skipped a stride at the touch of their bits, when the girl driving realized he was with someone she did n't know. Dropping her hand, she gave the pair their heads again, and the phaeton flashed by at unabated speed, the girl saluting with her whip, her eyes filled with dancing merriment.

“Why —” exclaimed Corrie, and then checked herself. In that moment's view she had recognized the girl as the one she had met on the steps when

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she rang Mr. Biggamore's bell. Corrie looked at Phil; and Phil, frowning uncomfortably, was ruefully staring after the fast disappearing phaeton, over whose folded hood the girl was looking back with a taunting, accusing smile. Then the trap swung out of view around the bend, and he drew in his breath with a sigh.

"Well!" he exclaimed, coming out of his silence, "it's all up with me now!"

He said it cheerfully, but with an air as if he could expect neither mercy nor forgiveness.

"How do you mean?" Corrie's tone was innocence itself, but beneath it lurked a little disquiet.

"Nothing much — only that's Virgie Deane, you know;" — this as if the fact were explicitly self-explaining.

"Miss Deane does seem to have upset you," observed Corrie, affecting to look across the lake to its most distant shore.

"So would you be upset," he laughed, "if you only knew Virgie. I promised yesterday I'd drive with her this morning, and just after I telephoned you, I called up her father's house and left word for her I would n't be able to accept. Worse than that: I said I found it impossible to get to the Park this morning. Now I suppose I'll never hear the end of it."

"Is that the way you always keep your engagements?"

Phil looked at her bewildered. "Are you trying to poke fun at me? You're nearly as eager as

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Virgie herself. Besides this was an important engagement. I just had to see *you*, and it could n't be put off."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes — that was just it," he went on heedlessly; "and besides, I can go driving with her any day. Virgie is a dear — she is, indeed — only Virgie would rather have a chance of rigging me than to do anything else she can think of — yes, she would!"

Corrie felt again that old pang of resentment against the little that life had given to her. She thought of the girl who had just driven by as she thought of others like her; girls of Corrie's own age who enjoyed a good home and a known name, and all the rest life had to offer. Yes! If she had owned a pair of smart ponies and a phaeton equally smart, and if she drove through the Park of a morning like that, perhaps he, too, would come with her. And then when the time had arrived and he held her in his arms and his lips hovered above hers ready to claim the offering, she could have given it to him without fear or reservation. For then — well, then, she would have been a girl of his own class, one of his own kind — a girl with wealth and position and a name, and not — not — no, not poor little Corrie, a paid companion, a girl subsisting on charity for a livelihood, and, in her poor little miserable heart, hungering for what was not hers — the unattainable, the unknown — hungering for even the name that was denied her.

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His voice awoke her from these sorrowful reflections, and she saw they had reached the gate.

"Shall I go with you as far as Mrs. Pinchin's door?" he asked.

Corrie said no; she would leave him there. He noted her wistful look, and at once, with a boy's self-consciousness, thought he was still unforgiven.

"Can't we still be friends?" he asked penitently; "won't you make up with me?"

"Yes; we shall be friends," she answered, and smiled at him. All the gloom swept out of his face at her assurance.

"Good-bye, Corrie. No, you can't prevent me!" he cried, when he saw her lips frame the reproof for calling her that again. "You are always to be Corrie — Corrie — no matter what happens. Good-bye, and don't forget to-morrow."

Corrie freed her hand from his. "To-morrow?"

It was his turn to look at her reproachfully then. "Have you forgotten about the album? You're to bring it down to the house. Promise now?"

"Yes — I promise."

"Good-bye, and don't forget — to-morrow afternoon. I have to hurry now, or Mrs. Pinchin will demand an explanation from me, too." He laughed as he raised his hat. "Don't you know? — my day's bread and butter. I'm still working over her houses. I can't throw up my job just because it's Mrs. Pinchin. Good-bye."

Long after she had left him he stood at the crossing looking after her.

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Poor Corrie again! Filled with eager anticipation, a feeling akin almost to delight, she had gone out to meet him, braving even Mrs. Pinchin's wrath to carry out her heart's desire. But heart's desire must be paid for, too, just as all else must be paid for, even the least of the little that life had given poor Corrie. To-day, in this case, she had paid for it by losing a friend — the friend *he* could never be again. She had lost a friend, and in losing him had she gained something else, something more than a friend? The color that crept up into her cheeks at the thought faded slowly. Had she gained a — — Once more Corrie contrasted herself with the smiling girl who had flashed by them in the Park; again the pang of envy and resentment stirred within the depths of her heart. No — why should she even dream of happiness like that? A boy's fancy, a momentary whim, the instant's impulsiveness, — that was all it meant. Numb and miserably in the depths, she toiled slowly up the steps, knowing now she had walked only in a dream that had brought its own awakening. Before it went any further — too far, as she said to herself — she must put an end to it all.

As Corrie reached Mrs. Pinchin's door the decision came to her. She would see him once more, and only once. She would tell him, and there it all should end. Afterward, when she had left Mrs. Pinchin's, she would make a life of her own, and try, in the forgetfulness of winning her way, to blot out all the dream had meant to her. Poor Corrie!

It was Maggie who answered the doorbell; once

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she saw who it was that rang, her eyes widened significantly.

“Ow, an’ is it you, miss?” she exclaimed, and then added warningly: “Miss Maria do be askin’ for ye, this long time.”

“Where is she?” asked Corrie, dully, knowing what was in store for her, yet careless of the outcome.

“Ye c’n set yer mind aisy on that, Miss. She’s gone, and ye ’ll not see her this day again, I’m thinkin’, for did n’t she take a trunk an’ all.”

Corrie murmured in astonishment. It was the first time in her experience of the household that Miss Maria had gone beyond the doors with a trunk; for never in that time had Mrs. Pinchin’s poor relation spent more than a few nights away from her. But dulled by all the happenings that had crowded in together so lately, Corrie made no effort to solve this new bewilderment; and shrugging her shoulders, she began slowly to take off her hat and coat. Maggie had nearly reached the basement stairs when she awoke sufficiently to think of Mrs. Pinchin, wondering whether she, too, had gone away on a visit.

“Did Mrs. Pinchin leave any word for me? She has n’t gone out for the night, too?”

“No, Miss, an’ she did n’t lave a word, either. Sure,” said Maggie, and cautiously lowered her voice, “she went out o’ here as if ’t was the plague she left behind. There ’ll be some wan waiting in the parlor for her now.”

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Corrie started up the stairs without troubling to look into the drawing-room. Below, she could hear Maggie grumbling on her way kitchenward, and she had almost reached the first landing, when she heard her name called.

"Yes," answered Corrie, and turned back curiously.

At the entrance to the drawing-room stood Miss Freedlark, the Sapphic poetess of Mrs. Pinchin's Sunday evenings. Corrie recognized the tall, weedy form, the figure now posing in the doorway and smiling indulgently, with a simper that widened her wide mouth like the maw of a Jack-o'-lantern. Evidently she was in her most condescending mood.

"I do hope I don't disturb you!" she implored, with a swanlike curveting of her lean neck, "but I *so* wish to see Mrs. Pinchin. You know she is giving another of her delightful little Sunday evening functions, and I'm just dying to learn all about it — yes, Sunday evening at eight, as you doubtless know."

Corrie didn't know. As a matter of fact, the news was almost a revelation; for could it be possible that Mrs. Pinchin, in the midst of the excitement and obvious alarms that had descended on her home, should still be determined enough to keep on with her formless, unclassed, social endeavors? It seemed incredible; and with a new spark of interest, Corrie listened attentively to the poetess.

"Oh, yes, indeed! Mrs. Pinchin wrote me this

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morning that I was expected; and she actually hinted of a plan to establish her evenings on a still more elaborate scale. But, there! Of course you know all about it, and don't like to speak of it without her permission. Is that it?" Miss Freedlark curved her neck and simpered anew, in the most insinuating manner. "But then, you won't mind telling *me*, since we are such good chums already. Besides, Mrs. Pinchin always is delighted to let me know." Curveting and smirking and preening herself with genial self-assurance, Miss Freedlark drew a notebook out of her reticule, and disposing herself in an attitude of intense and alluring attention, prepared to take copious notes. "Now there will be music—yes?" inquired the poetess, her pencil poised expectantly over the notebook.

"But I know nothing at all about it!" protested Corrie, who had been vainly trying to get in a word edgeways during Miss Freedlark's ecstatic assurances. "You'll have to see Mrs. Pinchin herself."

Miss Freedlark clucked her tongue tragically. "Oh, dear! how provoking! I suppose I shall have to wait then, and I am *so* pressed for time!" But distressing as the circumstance seemed to be, Miss Freedlark at once showed herself able to treat it philosophically. Replacing the notebook and pencil in her reticule, she clasped her hands beneath her chin, and leaned brightly toward the girl.

"*You* shall help the moments flit away, then!"

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she cried animatedly ; " now sha' n't we have a nice, cosy little chat together ? "

Corrie found a place on the sofa, not because she was allured by the prospect of a nice, cosy little chat, but rather because of a momentary thought. Miss Freedlark was known to be self-supporting ; perhaps Miss Freedlark, then, might be induced to reveal the usual methods. " You write, don't you ? " inquired Corrie, pleasantly, and leaned toward the poetess attentively.

Miss Freedlark's answering simper was a mixture of depreciation and self-consciousness. " Oh, yes ! " she murmured, striving to appear off-hand and casual ; though why the admission that she wrote should affect her so consciously, one is unable to say. At all events, Miss Freedlark showed it as her class inevitably show it, making as much of the admission as if she were a lawyer talking of law, or a millionaire talking of money, or a drummer who 'd sold a bill of goods, perhaps, or a coal dealer who 'd just got a contract — some one of that class who had done something really important and did n't mind talking about it. " Oh, yes ! " murmured Miss Freedlark, looking up at the ceiling, " my little verses sometimes flutter ephemerally into print. "

" I don't mean that kind of writing, " Corrie explained with an innocently frank directness ; " you write things you really get paid for, don't you ? "

Miss Freedlark's eyes fell suddenly from the ceil-

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ing and stared at Corrie with an altered and less exalted expression. "Occasionally — occasionally — not very important, however. Little pot boilers, something here and there, though of course all that one does write does aid so much toward grasp and technique." Rolling the phrase beneath her tongue, and, as if charged again with good humor at its happiness, Miss Freedlark simpered anew. "Grasp and technique and the larger spirit," she said unctuously, and waved a careless hand.

Corrie wondered, though she did n't say so, what element of grasp and technique entered into the composition of West Side Society notes, Miss Freedlark's most known writings.

"Every little helps, you know," added the poetess, grandiloquently.

"Yes, I suppose it does," Corrie answered reflectively. "I wish I knew how to write — or to do something like that."

Miss Freedlark, charmed at having so easily struck the answering chord, at once launched into a disquisition on the art of writing, and what an easy art it was to acquire, providing one harked to the instincts of the untrammelled soul. "Of course, situated as I am and dependent entirely on my art, I cannot devote myself always to what I feel; but some day, I hope, I shall be free to do that at last, — the inspired moment when I shall be at liberty to pen only the artistic and the worthy. But, of course, now," added Miss Freedlark, dropping into a less ethereal key, "you 're not like me. You don't have

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to think about board and lodging, when you have so good and generous an employer — I mean, so good a patron and friend as good Mrs. Pinchin. Ah! would that I, too, were as fortunate as you, Miss Robinson. I've often heard her tell how much she has done for you."

Corrie stirred restlessly. "Yes, — I've always realized she does," she responded enigmatically. "Sometimes it makes me wish I could do something for myself. Earn my living as you do, for instance. I think you are very fortunate."

It was Miss Freedlark's evident intention to simper again at the vague suggestion she was envied; but she had hardly disclosed her upper teeth in the simper, when another thought seemed to strike her. Her expression altered itself at once. "Why!" she cried, and bent forward eagerly, "you speak as if you were leaving Mrs. Pinchin. Can it be possible you are leaving your good and amiable friend?"

Corrie, realizing how she had committed herself, strove nervously to repair the mischief. But Miss Freedlark, animated to a degree unusual even with her, poured forth a stream of exclamations and inquiries, eager and impetuous. "Oh — ah, yes! — I see, Miss Robinson! You think of striking out for yourself? How interesting! You long to enter the field of my art — to search for the laurels of fame! You have noble thoughts, dreams, inspirations! Ah, how well I know the feeling! You long to find — may I not use the expression? — you long

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for your own *metier*. Naturally, you require a broader field than the narrow home life can offer, and so you are leaving Mrs. Pinchin? Is not that it?" Miss Freedlark, with an eagerness she now made no effort to conceal, rustled along the sofa toward Corrie. "You are giving up your place?" she demanded, and almost breathlessly added, "What day are you going to quit?"

Then, as if possessed of further enticing thoughts, Miss Freedlark licked her lips, and shot a quick glance about the room,—a look that perhaps calculated to a nicety the material comforts that would surround her, once she was freed from the struggle of following the *metier* she had just so wildly extolled to the girl.

"Oh, I did n't mean that! I'm not going to leave—not yet, anyway!" cried Corrie, now thoroughly disturbed since she saw the other's intention of immediately begging the place from Mrs. Pinchin. "Oh, you must n't say anything to her about it!" she cried, remembering her promise to Phil that she would stay there until she knew better what she must do. "You won't tell her, will you?" she appealed earnestly.

Miss Freedlark's face had lost its first eagerness, and she leaned back against the sofa, her ardor a good deal damped. "Oh, no— to be sure. I shall consider this as if—yes, if I may use the expression— as if entirely *entre nous*." Rising from her seat now, she managed to assemble a smile on her horselike features. "Well, I must be going. I fear

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I cannot wait any longer. But thank you for *such* a nice little chat."

The girl, thoroughly miserable, held out a limp hand to Miss Freedlark, and suffered her to shake it with equal inertness. "Good-bye, — and thank you *so!*" Miss Freedlark was saying when a loud peal of the doorbell interrupted. She started eagerly. "Why, there must be Mrs. Pinchin now. Is n't it fortunate?"

Possessed of the same idea, Corrie would have fled if she could. But already Maggie was coming down the hall from the pantry, wiping her hands on her apron as she scurried along, and it was too late to retreat.

But it was not Mrs. Pinchin after all. Corrie, peering over Miss Freedlark's shoulder, saw in the vestibule a plainly dressed woman, obviously a servant, who held a letter in her hand.

"Will there be a Miss Robinson living here?"

Corrie recognized her instantly; it was the servant who had let her in at Mr. Biggamore's.

"Yes; do you wish to see me?" asked Corrie, trying valiantly to hide her agitation from Miss Freedlark's prying eye. Phil had written! She felt the color mount into her cheeks, all the more embarrassed because she knew it had been detected.

"Oh, yes, Miss. My lady sent this, and would you tell me if there's an answer?"

Her *lady!* Not Phil, then, but his mother! Painfully conscious of Miss Freedlark's close attention, she took the note, and excusing herself, since Miss

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Freedlark gave no sign of departing, rapidly tore it open.

As she suspected — rather, as she knew, the note was from Mrs. Geikie. Turning her back, she read hurriedly, and then crumpled the letter in her hand. “Say that I shall be there — at four o’clock,” she murmured to the servant; “that is all.”

Miss Freedlark pulled her veil down over her bony chin. “Well, I really must be going. Will you tell Mrs. Pinchin I am most anxious to see her — about the Sunday functions, you know. Good-bye. I cannot begin to tell you how interesting our little chat has been.”

Corrie hurried to her room, relieved in mind that she was free at last. She locked the door behind her, and tossing her hat and jacket on the bed, hastily smoothed out the sheet of note paper.

“Dear Miss Robinson,” she read again, “after your visit of yesterday morning, certain matters have occurred that make it extremely imperative I should see you. Can you come here this afternoon at four o’clock? Had I the privilege of Mrs. Pinchin’s acquaintance, I should not have ventured so far in imposing on your good will, but instead, would have begged your permission to call on you. However, if you find it inconvenient to come here either this afternoon, or at a time in the near future, I shall be most willing to waive any consideration in the matter, and with your permission will hold myself in readiness to visit you at any time you find agreeable. The importance of the matter is

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**the only apology I may offer for the liberty I take
in asking this of you. Believe me,**

“LAURA GEIKIE.

Tuesday, April the third.”

**Drawing up a chair to the window, Corrie pored
over the writing again and again, trying to read
what lay between the lines.**

CHAPTER XII

Mrs. Geikie's home. — Her regret for having suspected Corrie. — The question of Mrs. Pinchin. — Corrie acknowledges herself. — The hunt for parents and a name. — Mrs. Geikie's sympathy. — The pictures on the wall. — The recognition. — Randolph Tollabee's wife. — The tea table in Mr. Biggamore's garden. — Mrs. Pinchin's magnanimous offer of an office and a safe. — The pot of damson jam.

IT was four o'clock.

"Please, Miss," said Mrs. Geikie's maid, returning down the stairs, "will you come up to her room?"

Corrie arose from her seat under the portrait of the youthful Mr. Biggamore and anxiously followed the servant. All her efforts to read between the lines of the letter that had brought her there had been as futile as the first attempt; she was still thoroughly in the dark.

"Come in," answered a voice, pleasantly, and Corrie timidly entered the room.

Through the broad, low windows the afternoon sunlight poured brilliantly. It was not a large room, by no means one so spacious, for example, as Mrs. Pinchin's ample boudoir; and in addition to this there were many other dissimilarities. One, in particular, was the absence of that ostentatious, aggressive newness that pervaded Mrs. Pinchin's

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home, — the wealth of varnish at its highest polish that gave to her surroundings something of the look of a furniture shop. A few pieces of mahogany, all of an ancestral age, stood about the room; the rug underfoot, softly suppressed in tone, would have paled in comparison beside Mrs. Pinchin's flowered, florid Wilton; and on the quietly tinted walls only a few drawings and photographs took the place of that extravagance of gold frames, colored prints, and the like, that in Mrs. Pinchin's chamber more definitely suggested the ability to buy rather than the ability to choose.

Mrs. Geikie was seated at a sewing-table near the window, and if one required any distinction between the two women, the fact that Mrs. Pinchin turned up her nose at any domestic employment as menial and beneath her in itself seemed sufficient. Mrs. Geikie arose as the door opened, and setting her work aside, smiled and offered her hand to Corrie.

“ You won’t mind my asking you up here, will you? ” she asked, though with cordiality rather than apology in the words. “ May I thank you, too, for letting me see you again? ”

Corrie nervously sank into the chair Mrs. Geikie offered, and still a little awkward and wondering, waited for her to declare herself. Though she had no guess why she had been asked there, she still suspected with a vague alarm that in some way it was connected with her morning’s walk in the Park — with that and, in other ways, with *him*. Yet when

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Mrs. Geikie spoke again, there was no connection between the words and the girl's troubled thought.

"I think, Miss Robinson," she said evenly, picking up the lace on which she was sewing, "I think that perhaps I may have seemed unkind in my attitude yesterday — perhaps unfair. My son told me on his return that you felt deeply the suspicion my brother and I must have shown, and since then, both he and I have regretted it. You will forgive us, won't you, and forget what was really only a natural reticence?"

A quick sense of relief swept through Corrie's breast; it was to make this gracious explanation, then, that Mrs. Geikie had been moved to send for her, and not for a more embarrassing cause.

"Indeed," resumed Mrs. Geikie, smiling pleasantly, "I think we have all been playing at cross purposes. Perhaps now we may feel inclined to trust each other more frankly — don't you think so, too?"

"Yes, Mrs. Geikie. And if I pained you yesterday, won't you forgive me? I know now how distasteful it must have been to you — how curious it must have seemed that an utter stranger should have come to you as I did."

"But you are no longer such a stranger, my dear," gently insisted Mrs. Geikie, with another reassuring smile. "I think we may talk now without any fear or restraint. My son has repeated to me a little of what you have told him, and I need hardly say we are deeply interested. Had we only

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known yesterday why you are so gravely and honestly concerned in learning the identity of your — of Mrs. Pinchin, there would have been no cause for our alarm. My dear," she asked, a kindly encouragement in her voice, "won't you tell me about it now? If you will let me know who you think Mrs. Pinchin is, and why you think so, perhaps I may be able to help you."

Once more the secret that Corrie had so resolutely guarded was to be drawn from her. To tell it now was no easier than before — perhaps even harder. She looked up, embarrassed, her eyes suffused with emotion, and then she saw, that even though this were his mother, she need have no fear in disclosing it. Besides, could she honestly let the suggestion stand that she sought to probe into only Mrs. Pinchin's identity? "No; that is not it," she faltered; "it was not only to find out about Mrs. Pinchin. It was —" She fixed her eyes on Mrs. Geikie's encouraging, sympathetic face, and clasped her hands in distress. "I am trying to find out about myself. Oh! it is so hard to say. Mrs. Geikie, I am trying to find out who I am, and — who my parents were. I don't even know whether they are living. I don't even know —" Her voice sank despairingly to a murmur. "I don't even know my own name."

Her voice broke at the words, faltering and filled with the trouble of such an admission; and the other leaned over and laid a pitying hand on Corrie's.

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“Yes; that is what we thought. That is one of the reasons why we sent for you.”

They were quiet for a moment, the gentle hand still stroking the girl’s in unaffected sympathy. Corrie brushed away her tears, and looking up, smiled a little as she spoke.

“You see why I could n’t tell you. It was something I was ashamed to speak about to anyone. Nobody ever cared, anyway, and there was no one who would offer to help. I think Mrs. Pinchin really knows who I am; but then, you see, whenever I asked her she grew furious at my questions. Sometimes I thought she was frightened, too. When I was a little girl, and used to try to find out about my mother and father from her, she locked me in my room. So I had to find out for myself; it was the only way. I didn’t dare let anyone know what I was doing, for I was afraid — afraid that Mrs. Pinchin would hear of it, and — oh, Mrs. Geikie — afraid of the truth should I learn it.”

“Yes — I understand. Poor little child!”

That was what he had said, too — poor little child! But the words were uttered now with even a deeper sense of pity — a mother’s knowledge of a woe like hers, a mother’s pity for a pitifully motherless child. The comfort in that look appealed to Corrie as no look ever before had appealed, and with a catch in her breath, she smiled back gratefully. “You seemed so sweet and kind when I saw you, I was almost tempted to tell you, and then

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your son, Mr. Geikie, came in, and I could n't — no, not before him."

"Then he does n't know?" asked the mother, softly.

Corrie no longer felt a desire to conceal anything from so gently understanding a confessor. "Yes — he knows. I told him everything, this morning, when I met him in the Park."

The hand still pressing hers quivered as if with a quick, uncontrolled answer to an unexpected pang.

"You and my boy were in the Park? Yes — yes, I see," she murmured, and the tone was unchanged, still gentle and controlled. "You told him all — though was it necessary, my dear child?"

Corrie resolutely kept on. "I told him because I wished him to know. I could n't keep his friendship honestly if I did not tell him. No — not when he is the first friend I have ever had!"

"Naturally you could not," agreed Mrs. Geikie, after thoughtfully looking at Corrie. "You felt you could permit no young man's attentions — is that it? — when so much about yourself remains in doubt. Yes — you are right."

For the first time during the interview, the gravely placid woman momentarily seemed to have lost interest in the girl's heartfelt appeal to her. A little drawn look of pain settled about her lips; there was a hint of sadness in her eyes. "Yes; — you did right with him!" she murmured, and fell silent.

Her glance drifted away to the opposite wall, where hanging from the picture molding was a por-

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trait in an oval frame. The face was of a man perhaps forty years of age, perhaps younger; an alert, firm-eyed face, well-bred, and, if not handsome, at least pleasant in its smiling kindness. Mrs. Geikie's glance rested on it for a moment, and Corrie's eyes unconsciously following, she realized from the resemblance between it and Phil's young face that this must have been the man who had died so shamefully as the result of another's shameful, tragic wrongdoing. But beneath the portrait was another picture, and her eyes lowering to it, Mrs. Geikie arose.

"Will you come look at this, Miss Robinson?" she asked.

Corrie saw it was a group of three young men in yachting flannels, all of the style of a past generation. Moved by the significance in Mrs. Geikie's tone, she pored intently at the old-fashioned print.

"This was my husband — the one in the center, Miss Robinson," said Mrs. Geikie, pointing out the figure, "and this young man — the one at his right — I think you have seen recently." Mrs. Geikie smiled as she spoke.

"You mean this one? Yes, why, it's Mr. Biggamore, is n't it? Mr. Biggamore, though much younger!"

"Yes; but have you ever seen this man — the one here on the left? Do you recall his face?"

The recognition came abruptly — convincing, once the suggestions dawned upon her; for it was

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the face of the man in the album at home, a more youthful likeness of the man in that other portrait.

“Yes, I know him. It *is* the one. I’m *sure* of it!”

“But do you know his name? — who he was?” persisted Mrs. Geikie, still with her finger pointing him out. “Have n’t you been told who he is?”

Corrie shook her head frantically. “No, — I don’t know that. I know only he is the man whose picture is in my album — the man dressed in heavy mourning. There’s a little child in his arms.”

“And you don’t know his name?” asked Mrs. Geikie, with a deeper suggestion in the question than even before.

Corrie despairingly said, “No.”

“That is Randolph Tollabee. My dear, I think you should try to remember it.”

Randolph Tollabee! — and with the suggestion now attached to the name, the understanding coming to her by leaps and bounds, all the romantic visions of her dreams whirled up before her, filling her mind with a flash of the living truth. Realization was face to face with her. Randolph Tollabee! — the name had ever appealed to the girl with a subtle force and intensity. White and quivering, Corrie stared into Mrs. Geikie’s face, her eyes passionately entreating the answer to the question they so passionately asked.

“Is it that? — what Phil meant? — why he wished me to wait?”

The mother gave no sign she had heard her son’s

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name spring so readily to Corrie's lips. She laid her hand again on Corrie's.

"Do not raise your hopes too much, child. I meant to prepare you, and — perhaps — perhaps — no, we do not know yet. You must wait till we make sure. I wished only to let you know what we were doing. I did not dream it would be so great a shock!"

The girl's hands clasped themselves together as she turned back to the picture, studying with a keener, more knowing intentness now, the face she already knew so well. "Oh — no, you must not tell me too much, Mrs. Geikie," she cried in a whispered emotion; "no — not unless you are sure it is true. To know the truth is all I have asked — it might be happiness enough. But to know who I am and that there is no — that I have a name and a right to the name — oh, the joy of it, Mrs. Geikie! That would be above any happiness I have ever had!"

Her eyes even now were filled with the dream. "Tell me about him. Tell me a little, won't you — and my — you will tell me whom he married — something about her, too?"

Mrs. Geikie went back to her chair, and slowly pondered. "There is really very little to tell — no, not very much, I think. You see, we never really knew the wife. It was — well, how shall I say it? — why, it was a very quiet match. Randolph we always knew, however. Late in life his father married again, and so far as the father's marriage is concerned, I can say frankly it was curious. In fact,

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the stepmother — Randolph Tollabee's stepmother, you understand — she was their housekeeper; a very respectable woman, I have been told, yet certainly not of his own station in life. She was a widow with a family of her own — children much older, I believe, than young Randolph Tollabee. At all events, the Tollabees dropped out of sight after this unfortunate marriage of the father, and we saw nothing of Randolph until he entered college. My brother — Mr. Biggamore, you know — was in the same class, as well as my husband. The three became inseparable after that."

"But his family — the Tollabee family, Mrs. Geikie?" asked Corrie, with a growing, uneasy suspicion of the facts, "what became of the stepmother and her children?"

Mrs. Geikie thought deeply again. "They were not known to us. There was the mother and some — some girls!" She halted, as if debating irresolutely the question of what she should say. Then she seemed to make up her mind. "Perhaps I should be entirely frank, my dear. One of these sisters — she was Miss Margaret Tollabee — well, I have reason to believe she is my husband's sister-in-law."

Mrs. Geikie, at this admission, looked anxiously at Corrie as if to discover what impression it made. Corrie nodded, and Mrs. Geikie looked a little astonished that it created no greater effect.

"I fancy my son must have told you that, too, my dear? I'm afraid Phil is too frank and open to learn ever to be reserved."

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But a moment later Mrs. Geikie smiled at her own vexation. "Oh, well," she sighed, "I suppose Phil's frankness is not to be cured. But to return to the Tollabees — — —"

"Yes," murmured Corrie, still uneasily; "you were telling me what had become of them."

"We don't know," answered Mrs. Geikie. "You see, we were not acquainted, and though we knew Randolph Tollabee supported them after his father's death, once he was dead — you understand I am speaking of Randolph now — we never heard of them again — not directly, at all events. But let me think a moment. I started to tell you about Randolph Tollabee's own wife."

"I'd like to know about her," said Corrie, hesitatingly; "will you tell me when she died and where it was? No one has ever told me."

Very quietly and sympathetically Mrs. Geikie rounded out the little story of Leonie Giraud, Randolph Tollabee's dead young wife, the mother of his child. "She was a young Frenchwoman who had been giving French to one of the Tollabee girls — I call them the Tollabees because they took the step-father's name. You may not have heard — of course you really do not know a thing about him — but Randolph Tollabee was a quiet, absorbed man who cared little for social life. We hoped he would marry someone we knew, a wife who would bring him a name and a place equal to his own; for the Tollabees, after all, came of an old and proud line in New York. Leonie Giraud was an orphan; her father,

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who was some sort of a political refugee, had died here penniless, leaving her alone and unbefriended. Certainly it was not the marriage we had anticipated, though she was very beautiful and obviously a gentle-woman. Randolph Tollabee married her while we were abroad; and then he went traveling, too; so we never saw her. Two years later we heard from him — and oh, that was a grief-stricken, heart-broken letter he wrote. He had lost her, my dear — she died when her little girl, Dorothy, was born."

"Oh, — how dreadful!" cried Corrie, shocked.
"And you never saw him again?"

Again a look of pain came into the quiet eyes, as if the question, innocently asked, had touched anew the soreness of an unhealed sorrow. "Let me make it clear to you," said Mrs. Geikie, with a quiet smile. "My boy says he has told you why we never mention the name of the man who lives here behind us. Certainly we have nothing to conceal; yet what is to be gained by speaking of it before the world? I shall tell you now, though, that this man not only ruined my husband and wrecked my brother's fortune, but was the cause, too, of estranging us from Randolph Tollabee. Indeed, Mr. Tollabee's own fortune was seriously involved, and it was because of it — it was for that — my husband — he — — —"

"Yes, I know. You must not speak of it!" whispered Corrie. "I have heard!"

"But I want you to know," Mrs. Geikie declared in a strained voice; "I wish everyone to know. Two days before his death, Randolph Tollabee wrote

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he had found a package of papers that cleared my husband of the slightest blame. To him, to us all, it seemed like a gift Heaven-sent to free us. My husband — he was still living, trying to clear himself by every act in his power, and to restore to others what they had lost — my husband hurried away to catch the first train to go to him. It was an all-night journey, for Randolph Tollabee was in Sprucemont, a little Adirondack village where he had gone to recover his wasted health. We could hardly wait for him to return, Mr. Biggamore and I. Then we got a telegram; my husband was coming home. My dear, Randolph Tollabee had died suddenly the day before, and there was no trace of the papers. They were gone. We never found them."

She turned her head away from the girl's young, absorbed face, and gazed thoughtfully through the window at her side. "Child, grief we must all suffer at some stage in our lives; but pray you may be spared a sorrow that bears with it a shadow you cannot lift — not of death, for there is a respect and nobility in that which helps to cure the pain; but the shadow of wrong and sin and evil. Do you understand me?"

Corrie had thought to ask something more, but she dared not now, fearful as she was of touching again the scar of that affliction. It was the question about Mrs. Pinchin — who she was, and whether they knew her now? But it must wait. Time would soon give her the answer, and then, too, Corrie had

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already learned much. As she sat thinking of it, there came a knock at the door. It was the servant.

"Please, ma'am," said the maid, "Miss Deane is below. She'd like to ask if she can have tea with you in the garden."

"Yes. I shall be down directly."

The maid departed, and Mrs. Geikie slowly arose.

"You must come to-morrow, my dear, and bring your album. I want you to see Mr. Biggamore once again, and give him all the information that is possible. I think we are in a fair way to clear up the mystery — yes, I feel certain about that. Now, you will come down with us and have a cup of tea?"

Though Corrie would have preferred to get quietly away to her thoughts, to escape seeing any one now, and, more particularly, the girl whose appearance in the Park that morning had affected her so strongly, there was no way in which she could very well refuse the invitation. The thought of seeing Phil, too, so soon, affected her; and as she and Mrs. Geikie went down the stairs together, Corrie decided she must depart as soon as she could, before he came in and found her there.

But all this decision was ordained to come to naught. As she and Mrs. Geikie reached the French windows leading out into the veranda, a peal of laughter came ringing up from the garden, a breeze of merriment in which Miss Deane's glee was echoed by a man's jubilant tones. Then, while the girl's jollity still filled the garden, Corrie heard Phil's voice lifted in mirthful remonstrance.

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“Oh, I say, Virgie, you’d better not let Uncle Phil catch you doing that!”

“Nonsense!” came the retort, with another ripple of gleefulness; “who’s afraid? I want one all for my own!”

“All right — go ahead, then. But he’ll pull out all his front hair if he catches you!”

Corrie involuntarily drew back as another burst of laughter rang in the garden. But it was too late now to escape. Miss Deane, with her skirt wrapped around her, was poised in the middle of Mr. Biggamore’s flower beds deliberately plucking the best sprays of hyacinth in the plot, while Phil, still remonstrating, was tugging the ears of a brindle bull terrier who growled hoarsely, and playfully snapped at his fingers. Mrs. Geikie added her voice to the chorus.

“*Virgie!* Stop picking the flowers! Have n’t you been told?”

The girl looked up, and though still bubbling with merriment, she picked her way back through the flower beds to the walk. “Oh, Mrs. Geikie, *please* don’t tell on me, this time!”

There was a lock of hair astray on her cheek, and her hat had assumed an unsafe angle during her attack on Mr. Biggamore’s flowers, yet her dishevelment served only to make her more attractive. Rosy and animated, she turned up her laughing face, trying very hard to look contrite and rueful, though the look was not much of a success; and then her eyes fell on Corrie.

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"Come here, Virgie," said Mrs. Geikie, who had tried to scold her with a look of seriousness that had failed, too; "I wish you to speak to Miss Robinson."

Phil, who had arisen and was trying to push away the exuberant, jumping bull terrier, swung around with an exclamation.

"Why, when did you come?"

A gleaming light of fun danced into the other girl's eyes. Phil detected it and colored faintly in confusion; and while Corrie followed Mrs. Geikie down the steps to the garden, she was conscious of Phil scowling at his tormentor, and of Miss Deane returning the scowl with rising merriment. Certainly, the knowledge added little to her ease, and when the other girl came forward, her hand outstretched and her lips parted in a frank smile of friendliness, Corrie, all the more conscious, tried vainly to hold back the color she knew had flooded into her cheeks.

Moreover, her confusion seemed shared by Phil, a fact that Miss Deane slyly acknowledged with another demure gleam. "It's very nice to meet you!" exclaimed Miss Deane, energetically gripping Corrie's fingers; "now we can have a real tea party — all four of us together! Phil! stop trying to push me away!"

"I'm only trying to welcome Miss Robinson, if you'll give me a chance, you know. Will you call off your dog, too, Virgie? Go 'way from here, you brute. How can I do anything when he's worrying my heels?"

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Miss Deane mocked him with another gleam, and called to the terrier. "Come here, Cave Canem; he sha'n't talk to you like that. You can see, Miss Robinson, what a dreadful disposition he has — I mean Phil; — not poor Cavie."

There was something so unaffectedly cordial in Miss Deane's heartiness that Corrie felt herself reassured. Furthermore, the arrival of the tea table at this juncture gave her a chance to compose herself.

"Phil!" cried his mother from the other side of the garden, "you and Virgie stop your quarreling, and you come here and light the lamp for me. You have n't told me yet what you 've been doing all day."

Phil, who had stopped exchanging words with Miss Deane to devote himself to Corrie, turned around with sudden interest.

"Oh! I 'd forgotten to tell. What do you think? — I have a new job offered to me!"

"A job!" mimicked Miss Deane, with unextinguished raillery; "that sounds as if you were really going to work. Is it honest, worthy toil, may I ask — the kind that requires a tin dinner-bucket?"

Phil frowned at her again. "You 'll be a great comfort to some one when you grow up, Virgie. Now please be seen and not heard. I was about to say I 'd been offered a new position — can you guess by whom?" He looked at his mother and then at Corrie, his eyes twinkling, when they shook their

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heads. "No, — you 'd better give it up!" he cried, enjoying their bewilderment, "for it was offered to me by — by — Mrs. Pinchin!"

"Philip! — is that true?"

"The Gospel truth, mother dear."

Miss Deane joined in again. "Mrs. Pinchin! I thought you were going to tell her to take back her old houses!" she exclaimed, in a tone that showed she, too, must know something about the situation.

Phil darted a swift look at Corrie, and then answered Miss Deane. "I am, Virgie, all in time. I can't throw up the work, though, right in the middle. I have to carry out the contract, no matter what faces I make over it."

"Phil," interposed his mother, gravely, "I wish to hear what Mrs. Pinchin offered you. Give Miss Robinson and Virgie their cups, and then tell me. Cream and sugar, my dear?"

"Yes, please," answered Corrie; "one lump and very little cream."

"Two lumps and lots of cream for me, Mrs. Geikie," begged Miss Deane; "and may I please have a lump for Cavie? He adores sugar."

Phil handed the tea to the two girls, and then offered them their choice of toasted biscuit, bread and butter, and cake.

"Going up!" murmured Miss Deane in a rising voice, as he stood before her with the curate and its three tiers of dainties. "I want the cake floor, please, elevator man."

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“Virgie! be still!” commanded Mrs. Geikie. “Now, Philip, tell me what I wish to know.”

Phil sat down and balanced his cup of tea on his lap. “Why, I was giving the plumbing contractor what-for over some work he’d done when I heard some one pounding up the stairs. It was Mrs. Pinchin, looking pretty fagged and worn out, as if the stairs had been the last straw. She had n’t been around for two days — rather curious, too, because she’d never missed a day before. I hardly ever failed to find her there, or, if she wasn’t there when I arrived, she came in later and insisted on following me around, poking into corners with her stick and blowing up the workmen and complaining they’d ruin her with their shiftlessness. Then, between rows, she’d try to make herself agreeable, asking me about my business, and if I was doing well, and inquiring about my family connections, and whether a young man did n’t require a lot of ready money to set up for himself. Why——”

“Phil!” exclaimed Mrs. Geikie, staring at him, “you never told us about this!”

“I know I did n’t, mother. What was the use. I thought she was just a vulgarly inquisitive old person who did n’t know any better. To-day I had a better reason than ever to dodge her, but I did n’t get a chance. ‘Hullo! — you here?’ she growled gruffly, and came hopping down the hall with her stick. By and by, after she’d taken a hand, too, in dusting off the plumber, she began to grumble again that she was being ruined, and that unless she got

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some one honest to take care of her houses, she 'd have to go into bankruptcy. Before long I could see she was leading up to something; then she plumped right out with it.

“ ‘ Young man, *you* take charge of my real estate. You won’t regret it. I ’ll give you an office of your own — not the garret where you work now, but a real office.’ ”

“ Fancy calling Phil’s upstairs room a *garret*! ” murmured Mrs. Geikie, blankly.

“ Yes,” her son continued, “ she said she ’d give me an office and pay me a good, round sum into the bargain. That was her expression — a good round sum. She named the amount, too, and it nearly took my breath away. When I shook my head, she wrung her thick, black eyebrows into a scowl, and came hopping up close in front of me, peering into my face. ‘ Ain’t it enough? ’ she demanded, and began working her jaws as if she were swallowing hard. ‘ How much do you want, then? Come! ’ she grunted, and then tried to wheedle me into accepting. ‘ I ’ll give you a big office, a nice, big, sunny place. You can bring all your papers there — all your papers and things like that, and I ’ll give you a safe to put ’em in. A nice, big safe — big enough for all you and your family. When you go away, they ’ll all be secure; — no one can get at them. Why, I ’ve got a good, big safe already picked out for you. Come; is it a bargain? A good, big office, I ’m telling you. If you want anyone else to be in with you, why you can have them. I don’t mind. You ’ve got a

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friend, maybe, or a relative — did n't you say you had an uncle? Well, I don't mind; — have whoever you want. Do you accept? ” ”

“ I told her I 'd have to make up my mind. ' To be frank,' I said to her, ' I don't think I will accept it. Still, I 'll think of it.' For a moment, I thought she was going to persist, but she only looked at me sourly, and went stamping down the stairs. ' Hunh! You don't want it! ' she growled, and then to my astonishment added, ' Well, I did n't suppose you would.' It was exactly as if she had only worked herself up into asking me, and really did n't care. Just as if she had been put up to asking me, and never had felt any faith in what she was doing.” ”

Corrie listened absorbed. It was another coil in the mystery, — something crafty and planned for a purpose, she had no doubt, but what the purpose was, only Mrs. Pinchin might tell.

Mrs. Geikie, with her chin in her hand, sat forward listening closely. “ As if she had been put up to it? ” she repeated thoughtfully; “ yes, I think I know now, too, who put her up to it.” Then, involuntarily, she looked up at the closed, secretively shuttered windows of the house behind.

“ Well, that 's all I have to tell,” said Phil, arising. “ Excuse me a moment, will you? ” ”

Glancing at Corrie with a subtle smile, he entered the house through the lower door, just as the maid emerged.

“ Please, Mrs. Geikie,” said the servant; “ Miss Deane's carriage is at the door.” ”

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Miss Deane arose hastily. "Mercy! — I must be going. Mother will think I'm lost." She held out her hand to Corrie, who had risen too, and then, as a thought struck her, she smiled brightly. "You are going uptown, are n't you? Won't you let me take you home?"

Corrie tried to escape what she thought would be only a bother to the girl. But Miss Deane read the objection before it was spoken. "Oh, please let me. I'd dearly love to!"

It was a simple thing, kindly done, cordial and unaffected. Mrs. Geikie smiled and nodded, evidently glad of it, and wishing Corrie to accept the well-meant kindness.

"If you 're sure it would n't be a bother," she faltered uncertainly. "But you must n't take me all the way. It 's so far from your own home, is n't it? Can't I get out at the Park?"

"Oh, no, indeed. Where's Phil now? Phil!" she called, "we 're going."

"Coming as fast as I can!" He emerged from the lower door, hastily cramming a parcel into his coat pocket as he joined them.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Geikie!" cried the girl, blowing her a kiss as she ran lightly up the steps to the veranda; "I may come in again to-morrow."

She disappeared through the tall, French windows with a last wave of her hand, Cave Canem gamboling at her heels. Corrie held out her hand to Mrs. Geikie.

"Good-bye, too. I shall bring the album to-

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morrow morning. Good-bye. You are very kind and sweet to me."

During that brief half hour in the garden the girl had been very quiet and absorbed, thoughtfully repressed as if she realized with a new distinctness the difference between her own self and that other girl — a young life buoyant and spirited, filled with the wholesome cheerfulness that no sorrow had yet impaired. How she longed to be like her — longed to possess the other's happiness, her name and her place — most of all, that innocent happiness.

"My dear, good-bye. I think it is all coming out right — I think so. But do not let your dreams become too strong. You must prepare against disappointment, and what disappointment might bring. Good-bye, now," she murmured, as she left Corrie at the door.

The voice was just as gentle, the manner just as kind; yet if in reality Mrs. Geikie had closed the door with her son on the inside, and poor Corrie left standing alone outside, the girl could not have more clearly realized the gulf that would lie between them until her name and her parentage — good parentage, too — were established.

At the curb the brougham waited. A footman held open the door, looking on with a grin while Phil and Miss Deane struggled to bundle the reluctant Cave Canem inside. From the box a stony-faced coachman ignored the byplay with British stolidity.

"In there, you clown!" urged Phil, and with a

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final effort lifted the struggling dog inside; "now stay there!"

"He's just seen a cat," explained Miss Deane, succinctly; "will you get in while I hold him?"

Corrie climbed in over the writhing dog; Miss Deane followed, and breathed a sigh of relief when the door was banged to. "Good-bye, Phil! I hope to see you soon doing worthy toil in a perfectly worthy pair of overalls."

"Where to, Miss Deane?" asked the footman.

His mistress had just told him, the footman was springing to the box, when Phil, who had turned away, cried out to them to stop.

"Hi! wait a moment! I've forgotten something!"

Tugging at his coat pocket, he came running up to the carriage window, and gravely handed Corrie a parcel bound in wrapping-paper. "Don't let Virgie get her hands on it!" he warned, and, with a laugh, ran back to the house.

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Miss Deane, indignantly, and instantly starting forward, leaned from the window as if to scream back a withering retort. But Phil had disappeared, so Miss Deane had to content herself with a sniff. "Perhaps it's an infernal machine," she suggested, eyeing the package disdainfully, though with evident curiosity. "One might have thought so from the way he spoke!"

Corrie, whose curiosity was not less than hers, said the best way to find out was to look. So, a little

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embarrassed and conscious, she slowly unwrapped the folds of paper, one by one, a matter somewhat difficult since the other girl insisted on helping and peeping, too. But when the object was revealed, Miss Deane gave it a single look, gasped, and then burst into a gale of merriment.

“Oh! what a lark! I’ll never let Phil Geikie hear the end of *this!*”

But poor Corrie, ready to do anything but laugh, sat and stared at the present in her hand.

It was a pot of damson jam!

CHAPTER XIII

In which Miss Freedlark, the poetess, is descried in the rôle of Sister Anne.—Her vulgar, prying curiosity.—Corrie's reflections and their result.—Mrs. Pinchin a thief?—The bandbox and Mrs. Pinchin's agitation.—Miss Freedlark's curiosity obtains its just deserts.—The family dinner and what happened thereat.—Miss Freedlark's dissertation on High Life, and the falling of the second thunderbolt.—Mrs. Pinchin's departure in the rain.—The midnight prowler and the sobbing on the stairs.

DU SK had come crowding swiftly on the heels of the waning day, when a hand cautiously parted the curtains of Mrs. Pinchin's drawing-room window far enough to disclose the bony, knowing visage of Miss Mina Freedlark, the poetess. Flattening her face against the glass, and with an intentness comparable to the fabled anxiety of Sister Anne on her tower, Miss Freedlark closely reconnoitered the sidewalks in one direction, and then turned around and as closely reconnoitered them in the other. This alert lookout continued for some minutes, her absorbed interest increasing rather than abating as the time progressed; and whatever the nature of her enterprise or what the cause of her vigilance, she was still anxiously straining her eyesight when a brougham turned the corner.

To be explicit, the brougham was Miss Deane's, which was bearing Corrie to Mrs. Pinchin's door.

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Inside, the two girls sat talking together amiably, Corrie edging in a word now and then to spur the other on in her whimsical, amusing chatter; and how happy the drive had been and how short, she realized when she looked up to see regretfully they were turning into Mrs. Pinchin's street.

"Why!" she exclaimed; "we're at Mrs. Pinchin's already."

"Mercy! do you live there? I didn't know that!"

Corrie colored faintly, as she frankly turned to the girl. "I am Mrs. Pinchin's companion, Miss Deane."

"Her companion! Oh! what a lark! — and you live with her?" Miss Deane's exclamation ended suddenly in a peal of merriment; as suddenly she reached out her hand and patted Corrie's.

"Oh — I didn't mean to be rude. I was thinking about Mrs. Pinchin. You really live with *her*?"

"Yes; did n't you know it?"

"No; mercy, no! Phil told me only Mrs. Pinchin was up to something queer, — she and that dreadful uncle of his. But does n't she suspect you and Phil are — I mean, has n't she found out about you two being — Gracious! you know what I mean!" exclaimed Miss Deane, confusedly, and then bubbled over with merriment again.

"No, she has n't found out we're friends. Good-bye; and thank you very much for bringing me home."

"Oh, don't thank me for that. You don't know

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what a lot of fun I've had. Look!" cried Miss Deane, suddenly grasping Corrie by the arm, "is that the old bear? Is that Mrs. Pinchin? My! She's staring at us like a fish in a glass tank!"

Not a discreetly elegant remark, though precise. It was Miss Freedlark at the window, still in the posture of Sister Anne.

At the brougham's approach the alert female, with an eye trained specifically to the externals of wealth and smartness, had fixed herself in a favorable position to spy out the occupants when it passed. But the brougham, instead of continuing down the street, as she had anticipated, drew in toward the curb, and, with a clatter of hoofs and a minor jingling of curbchains, to Miss Freedlark's broad and unconcealed amazement, came to a halt in front of Mrs. Pinchin's, and let out only that lady's paid companion. It was the watcher, with her mouth open in astonishment, that suggested to Miss Deane her apt, if inelegant, comparison.

Miss Freedlark writhed hastily out of view. Her first thought, of course, was that this was someone to whom Corrie had applied for a position — perhaps someone who had already engaged her, for there was no reason to believe that a paid companion could boast a friend as smart and well-to-do as Miss Freedlark's discriminating eye had instantly seen Miss Deane to be, from the smartness of the brougham and the footman at its door. Yes! she had found another place — was that not it? But this pleasing reflection had no sooner entered Miss Freedlark's

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mind than it was doomed to wither pitifully. For while she lurked behind the curtains, she saw Miss Deane lean from the carriage and wave a gay good-bye to Corrie.

“Don’t forget — Tuesday — at four. Phil’s coming, too!” she cried, and Miss Freedlark could not very well miss hearing her, since Miss Deane shrilled it with buoyant animation.

Miss Freedlark, quite beside herself with curiosity, opened the front door for Corrie. “Why, here you are at last! I’ve been watching, I should say waiting for you, just ages. You’ve been taking a carriage ride, have n’t you?”

Corrie saw with some degree of curiosity, too, that Miss Freedlark had doffed her hat and jacket, and apparently was very much at home.

“I have been driving — yes!” she answered. “Has Mrs. Pinchin come in?”

“Oh, yes; ages ago. But she’s gone out again. You’re not to go out until she’s seen you. Now you have n’t told me yet who your swell friend is. Just think of you riding in such an elegant turnout!”

As Corrie drew off her gloves, she turned and laid first one and then the other on the hall table, trying quietly to evade the woman’s vulgar prying. “Are you staying to dinner?” she asked, looking up at Miss Freedlark when she had straightened out her gloves.

“Oh, yes. Mrs. Pinchin has asked me to visit her a day or so — maybe longer. Is n’t it nice? I’m sure we’ll get to be great friends, won’t we? Now

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tell me all about your drive with that lovely girl. Seems to me I 've met her, though I just can't place her now."

" Possibly; I can't say. Did Mrs. Pinchin say when she would return? "

Corrie felt no possible interest in the moment when Mrs. Pinchin might return. But anything to dodge such persistent curiosity. " Will she be out late, Miss Freedlark? " she inquired with a forced concern.

The curiosity that still stirred the woman to the depths of her inquisitive nature was too potent, however, to be turned aside by such a simple artifice as this.

" Hey? Oh, she 'll be in by and by. But you 're not going to run away, are you? " she asked in slight astonishment, when Corrie had picked up her gloves and was wandering slowly toward the stairs. " Why, you have n't told me yet all about your lovely carriage ride. Now, come; she 's real fashionable, is n't she? Don't you try to say she is n't! " Miss Freedlark wagged a bony finger at Corrie, and frowned playfully. " Say, " she questioned confidentially, with a reviving spark of hope, " you 're not going to live with her, are you? A little bird tells me you 've got a new place. "

Biting her lip vexatiously, Corrie went on up the stairs without troubling herself to answer.

In her room, Corrie dropped her things on a chair and sank on the edge of her bed. Once more she felt the reaction from the day's trying excitements, and twining her hands together, she sighed

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with a deep inspiration, as if to free her breast from its weight. Until now she had not stopped to reflect on the probable or possible consequences of the many disclosures — what they meant or where they led. What was in store for her? — what, when the climax of these revelations came? The thought quickened in her mind, bearing its vision of Mrs. Pinchin facing the *dénouement* — cold! tragic! passionate! — enraged, no doubt; or defiant and majestic, fighting to the last the assault on her security. For, indeed, what would Mrs. Pinchin do when she learned? A little chill of fear swept through Corrie's heart at the thought of it, — a creeping terror bred to her long association with the grim, unlovely, dark, and masterful woman, unloving and loveless, the incarnation of a greed that would tread underfoot whoever stood between her and her implacable self-indulgence.

But if Corrie were the Tollabee child, where was the Tollabee fortune? Where were the Tollabee lands? Where the Tollabee estate? The thought, bred blindly, avalanched itself on the girl's mind with all its dire significance. Mrs. Pinchin a thief! a perjurer! the embezzler of a dead man's goods and chattels! The sudden creeping terror in Corrie's heart grew to a ghastly coldness now. Pale and frightened, she gasped, her hand flying affrightedly to her lips. All the repugnance and dread she had ever felt for the woman arose now, magnified, terrifying, complete, shaking her to the fiber of her soul. Her heart beat thickly. The terror whose only thought is flight gripped her fiercely. Then the relief came, —

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a doubt, a sickening reassurance of the absurdity of her thoughts. Mrs. Pinchin a *thief*? Incredible! Ridiculous! Outlandish! It was all a nightmare; she had been deluded by hope! Led astray! It was absurd to think of such a thing.

But if Mrs. Pinchin were only Mrs. Pinchin and no one else, who, then, was Corrie?

“Oh my soul!” moaned the girl, and dropped her face into her hands. For doubt, bringing its relief, had raised its own other terrors, too.

Sick with her depression, Corrie dressed herself for dinner, an ordeal for which she was miserably unprepared. To face Mrs. Pinchin at any moment now seemed trying enough, but to undergo what she felt surely must be in store for her, with that other prying, vulgar woman looking on, was far more than she could submit to calmly. However, there was no way out of it, and turning down her lamp, Corrie closed her door behind her, and slowly descended the stairs.

Miss Freedlark came to meet her in the hall, more exasperating than ever with her affability. “Well! I *declare*! What a long time it takes you to prink! You must be expecting — *someone*!” She smiled archly, her narrow, fleshless face drawn by the grin into a semblance of the naked humor of a skull. “Now tell me right away all about him! I’m just *dying* to hear the little secret!”

Corrie stared at the woman gravely, her shadowy eyes betraying no hint of her aversion and resentment. But the stare, neither insolent nor rebuking,

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prolonged itself beyond the limit of mere carelessness, so that the bony smirk faded uncertainly. Miss Freedlark's geniality, however, was of a kind too bald to be abashed by subtle methods, and again the wide mouth confidently grinned its reassurance — knowing, officious, and impertinent.

"Oh, you lucky girl! I'm sure you've caught a beau who's swagger — and rich!"

"Go into the drawing-room, Miss Freedlark. Perhaps Mrs. Pinchin will come in shortly."

There was a pointedness in the rebuke now, to which even Miss Freedlark's thick skin was scarcely proof. Her face fell. "Why! you're not mad, are you?" she pleaded hastily.

"If you need anything, ring for the servants."

Deaf to the other's profuse murmurs, Corrie stalked into the dining room, where Maggie, with a lowering brow, was putting the last touches to the dinner table.

"Do you know when Mrs. Pinchin is coming in, Maggie?"

The maid raised her eyes sullenly. "Sure, all I know is what orders she give. Dinner a half-hour early, an' me an' all me work put out."

Maggie, with another scowl, slouched around to the serving table and snatched up a dish of olives and a sharp-tined fork.

"Can I help you?" suggested Corrie, hunting an excuse to stay away from the drawing-room and its inquisitive tenant.

Maggie jabbed an olive viciously with the fork.

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“I ’ll not ask for any help. There ’ll be enough a’ready minowdering arount, an’ a-puttin’ in their fingers.”

“What do you mean?” demanded Corrie, icily, incensed at the suggested insolence.

“Ow! beggin’ yer pardon, ma’am! On me sowl I did n’t mean *you!*” cried Maggie, alarmed that she had been misunderstood; “’t was that other wan — her wit’ the bony face to her like yer knuckles.”

“Maggie, you must n’t talk like that. Miss Freed-lark is a guest in this house.”

“Ow! Glory be! An’ her only on a visit! Wad you ever know the likes of that now? Sure, did n’t she come a-pokin’ in here? And a-puttin’ her face into all the closets? And a-pullin’ out av all the drawers? And a-googlin’ arount in the corners? And a-wearin’ ye out wit’ her questions? ‘Ow, is it this where ye kape yer chiny?’ — and ‘Ow, is it them where ye kape yer preserves?’ — and — ‘Ow, ’t is where ye find the linen, ain’t it, becowse ’t will come handy like av a day unbeknownst!’ Ugh! the fairies fly away with the like of her!” cried Maggie, her brogue and her indignation growing apace. “A-prowlint an’ a-puttin’ her nose into places, like she was an owl woman huntin’ eggs av a morning in the cow-byre.”

“Maggie!” — this indignantly, though Corrie found it difficult to stifle a smile.

“Ow! — well, an’ what av that?” Maggie trussed her elbows to her sides, and leaned over with the olives outstretched feelyingly in one hand, and the

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olive fork in the other. "Sure, an' wad n't she be askin' me about yerself, too, an' ——"

"Maggie!"

"Oy! an' ye can't stop me tellin' ye. A-askin' me, did I know yer young man, an' what his name wad be, an' ——"

"Maggie! Stop this instant!"

"Oy! yes!" said Maggie, raising her voice a little higher, "an' a-wantin' to know had ye run off the day from Mrs. Pinchin to meet wit' him, an' ——"

Corrie fled to the hall, crimson and infuriated. She was enraged at Maggie! Enraged at the Freedlark woman! Enraged at Mrs. Pinchin for bringing the creature into the house to spy on her!

"Sure — an' would n't she — an' was n't she — an' did n't she?" Maggie's voice went on crying after her. "She did, an' ——"

Then the front door opened, disclosing Mrs. Pinchin.

Her face was haggard and of a leaden, sickly pallor, the corners of her mouth drawn back into the mirthless, painful semblance of a grin. Her eyes, always profound and gloomy, burned with a fiercer moodiness than ever, and under the veil rolled up on her bonnet in a wad, they gleamed forth with a fixed and warning latency, as immobile and contemptuously menacing as a snake's.

There was a bandbox in her hand. As she lurched through the doorway, it caught on the woodwork, and with a grunt and an ugly wrench she tore it free, her stick clattering against the woodwork in her vehe-

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mence. Freeing her latchkey from the lock, Mrs. Pinchin slammed the door, and ponderously turned around. Her eyes fell on Corrie.

What the bandbox contained Corrie was destined, later on, to learn. Now it seemed to be only a bandbox, a pasteboard case enclosing perhaps a hat — a new bonnet — maybe a feather, one of the juvenile plumes with which Mrs. Pinchin so loved to deck her majestic crest. But the moment Mrs. Pinchin's eyes clapped themselves on Corrie, the bandbox became the object of Mrs. Pinchin's instant and pressing concern.

She whirled it around till its label was concealed, holding it behind her like a child with a stolen piece of candy. Then she tried awkwardly to sidle up to the door of her private room, as if to trim sheets aft into that safe haven. But other eyes less guileless than Corrie's were watching her, and at that crucial moment, a piercing voice bugled gleefully from the drawing-room:

“Oh! *here* you are!”

Silence answered the greeting. Miss Freedlark charged gallantly closer to the line of danger.

“Oh! you 've been shopping. You 've brought something home.”

Still silence. Mrs. Pinchin fished desperately in her pocket for the key to her private room. The bandbox was still held behind her.

“Oh! it 's a hat! I can see the edge of the box. You 've been buying a hat!”

A grim and minatory dumbness settled on Mrs.

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Pinchin's face — a stillness akin to that hush before the bolt of lightning sluices earthward, bearing destruction in the crash.

"Oh! you must let me see it!" cackled Miss Freedlark, swooping archly at Mrs. Pinchin's secret burden; "I'm just dying to see your new, pretty little hat. Do let me have a peep!"

"Mind your own business!"

So fell the lightning bolt, the Jovian lance! The ripping, lash-like crack of the detonation burst upon the appalled moment, crashed *forte possibile*, and stalked down to the horizons with a rumbling thunder tread. "Ugh! Hunh!" grunted Mrs. Pinchin.

That was all. Afterwards the living world sat up and took stock of the casualties. The cloud from which this rivening stroke had fallen hid itself from view; for, leaning over the keyhole, Mrs. Pinchin fumbled a moment with the lock, the door gave in, and she disappeared.

Then like the stricken oak — or would it be more apt to take some other sylvan likeness? Mind, it is Miss Freedlark who is pictured now — but, like the stricken oak, or maybe stricken poplar, or, likely as not, some slim birch sapling, or, if you choose better, a lank, attenuate ash — like whichever you choose of these, the victim raised a slightly singed crest, after the bolt had passed, and looked to see whether Earth still survived the destroyer. A slight and perfectly uncomfortable shudder hunched up her shoulders a trifle; but

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“Like some tall crag that lifts its awful form,
Rears from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,”—
and all the rest of it, Miss Freedlark, with a good
deal of discomfort to herself, managed to wring her
cadaverous features into an appeasing and benevolent
smile. The lightning, it appeared, had only chipped
the bark. “My!” she exclaimed, looking at Corrie
with an arch twinkle in her pale, fawning eyes,
“was n’t it funny of her? — just on account of a
little bandbox! Now, if we were n’t *such good
friends!*”

A deep and sincere pity for the woman sprang im-
pulsively into Corrie’s heart. She read behind the
arch twinkle of the pale, fawning eyes; saw through
the sprightly affectation of carelessness by which the
victim tried miserably to screen her hurt; and suffer-
ing for the woman’s poorly hidden shame, the girl
generously forgot the past hour’s vulgarity, the pry-
ing, the low-bred, inquisitive effort to delve into her
affairs. Poor thing! Corrie was little more than a
child, yet she owned the quick divination that trouble
gives to one to detect another’s sufferings. Miss
Freedlark writhed, and she saw it.

“Oh! I am so sorry. You must n’t feel hurt at
what she said, Miss Freedlark. Mrs. Pinchin really
did n’t mean it,” she cried, though she was quite cer-
tain, of course, that Mrs. Pinchin did mean it.
“She’s just irritable because she’s tired out. Oh,
I am so sorry for you!”

A wave of color swept up into the woman’s face,
and her eyes took on a contemptuous hardness. “In-

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deed!" she exclaimed acidly, and opened her lips to continue in the same sneering tone, when the door behind her opened, and Mrs. Pinchin emerged.

She had discarded her hat and coat, and once more her face had assumed its ordinary dark and moody solemnity. She ignored Corrie, and, as if regretful for her show of temper, spoke to Miss Freedlark in a tone that, if not cheerful, was at least restrained and civil.

"I 'll be down in a moment. Will you step in the parlor till I dress for dinner?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! You must n't bother about *me*," answered Miss Freedlark, mollified and ready to fawn again.

At the stairs Mrs. Pinchin turned and gazed at Corrie, the glance sweeping her from head to foot. "I want a few words with you, girl," she rumbled, peering out from under her shaggy brows.

Another scene, thought Corrie, as she followed silently in Mrs. Pinchin's wake, wondering what turn it was to take. But why should she care, no matter what Mrs. Pinchin said or did? Only a few hours now, and she would be free — free of Mrs. Pinchin and her oppression — free, no matter what she found out about herself — free, whether she had a name or not, whether nameless or known.

"Now," said Mrs. Pinchin, suddenly, after closing the door behind her, "I want to know what you 're up to!"

She planted her stick on the carpet, and gazed at Corrie, her face filled with solemnity. More

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than ever, she looked massive and masterful, royal, almost, as she stood upright with her great head thrown back on her shoulders. "You must tell me," she commanded sternly, "for I wish to know."

Corrie watched her curiously. Impressed by Mrs. Pinchin's majestic calm, she felt a sudden unexpected terror that she herself was the one to be judged, rather than the woman who now stood facing her with a quiet dignity of resentment. Swiftly at work, the girl's mind harked back to the recent happenings, to this conspiracy directed at her, who, as well as not, might be innocent, even unsuspecting, of all with which she had been charged on evidence that was really only suspicion. No! the charge seemed incredible. Mrs. Pinchin's eyes, proudly unwavering, still quietly searched the girl's face, and Corrie moistened her lips.

"You do not answer me," murmured Mrs. Pinchin, in a subdued voice.

There was nothing for Corrie to answer. Swayed by the new view of her own conduct, a guilty interpretation now of her duplicity, her eyes dropped before the calm, scrutinous face that seemed to peer deep into her breast's secret depths.

"A letter was brought to you at my door, to-day; you went out afterwards," said Mrs. Pinchin, in an even, unaccusing voice; "will you tell me where it was from — where you went? While you are under my roof and in my charge, I have a right to know how you conduct yourself."

Repressed, dignified still, and apparently unaffected, Mrs. Pinchin awaited the answer to a ques-

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tion manifestly reasonable. Corrie lifted her troubled face, uneasy and almost fearful, all other feelings for or against Mrs. Pinchin now abdicated to a new-born sense of respect. In it, too, was almost admiration.

“I would rather not tell you — I can’t, Mrs. Pinchin,” she answered gently; “I can’t because it would betray a confidence. The letter was from a friend.”

“A friend? Girl, what friends have *you*?” retorted Mrs. Pinchin, with no shade of mockery in the question.

“Almost none — one or two, perhaps, Mrs. Pinchin.”

“Friends!” repeated the majestic figure, solemnly, with an echo close to a grave pity hidden behind the word. “*Friends* — and have you thought, perhaps, that these *friends* of yours may be making you a catspaw? Have you suspected they may be using you for their own ends? I am not sure who your friends may be, but I might guess — I might guess,” she muttered hollowly, a thought reflected in her eyes. “Well,” she said painfully, as if she mused, “it was to be expected. It was the thing that might be looked for.” She stared down at the floor, as if some thought had started another train of thoughts. “No,” she added with a quick look at Corrie, her voice rolling deeply, with a force of hidden significance; “I’ve tried my best. I’ve done all I could, but you are bound to have your way. Go on, girl,” she murmured, her head raised again to humble Corrie with its pride and injured dignity; “let nothing

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stand in your way till you have learned. And then, when you have found out what you are seeking, perhaps I shall have room in my heart to pity you!"

"Oh, *Mrs. Pinchin!* Why do you say that?"

The majestic figure swung alertly toward her.

"Tell me, then!" cried Mrs. Pinchin, dominantly; "who is it that is egging you on?"

Corrie shrank back from her, once more hanging her head.

A grim silence followed. Mrs. Pinchin, with her jaws working together, hobbled toward her dressing-table, her back turned to Corrie.

"You can go now. I've had my say!" she growled, after the pause, and with her back still turned, waved meaningly toward the door. "Go!" Thus dismissed, Corrie took herself from the room.

Twenty minutes later the muffled thump of Mrs. Pinchin's cane sounded on the stairs as she ponderously descended. She still wore her morning attire, the waist and skirt of heavy black brocade, and in her hand was clutched the vial of smelling-salts. "Come!" she grumbled, appearing at the drawing-room door; "dinner's on the table."

Corrie, fumbling over the music on the piano, jumped up from the stool. Across the room, Miss Freedlark, who had been traveling about, industriously handling the ornaments and staring at all the pictures, turned with a set smile and followed.

"Can't I give you an arm, my dear?" she pleaded

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with Mrs. Pinchin; "you 've had *such* a long day of it!"

"No!" rumbled Mrs. Pinchin, stumping onward alone. She reached the dining room; and, without waiting for anyone's aid, dragged out her chair, and fell into it heavily. Her eyes, lowering, pored on the cloth before her; and when Maggie set down her plate of soup, Mrs. Pinchin stared at it dully, as if for once her devotion to the love of eating had become a secondary thought. Then, when she had picked up her spoon, Mrs. Pinchin stirred her soup listlessly awhile, gulped a mouthful, and aimlessly went on stirring. Presently she laid the spoon on the plate's edge, and leaning back in her seat, began absorbedly fingering her napkin.

But however the hostess showed her listlessness and preoccupation, Miss Freedlark more than made up for it. Her animation was distracting; her chatter endless and versatile. Unaffected by the grim figure dreaming moodily at the table's head, Mrs. Pinchin's guest soared away into genial flights of small talk, as if bound to make herself agreeable. She praised the soup, sipping it with a little finger stiffened into elegant rigidity. She praised the olives, the celery, and the radishes. Doubtless, she would have praised the salt, too, in turn, if the coming of the fish had not distracted her attention. Then she praised the fish and the crisp potato chips with it. She praised the tartar sauce that was passed to her by Maggie, and when a muttered "hunh!" warned her she had dwelt too elaborately on the subject, she changed her praise

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to something else of Mrs. Pinchin's. Meanwhile the dreamer at the table's head played listlessly with her fork, never so much as looking up when the fish was whisked away untasted.

But to talk, to ramble on whether heard or unheard, seemed enough to entertain the guest. Corrie looked at her thoughtfully, and then as thoughtfully at Mrs. Pinchin. The somber figure had now taken to rolling her bread into pellets, a task she occasionally varied by grasping a knife and fork and half-heartedly picking at the roast meat and vegetables before her. At the salad, Miss Freedlark's *obligato* of unceasing chatter had rounded up into the topic of society—not that society which embraces massed civilization, but the society which is ever dignified with a capital S in the minds of those who interminably chatter and write about it.

The smug, toadying phrases of the sect rang in Miss Freedlark's speech, a Rabelaisian glossary of glib terms and phrases common to such women's talk. There were *functions*, whatever she meant by that, and they were inevitably *charming*. There were weddings, always at *high* noon; never at low, vulgar midday. She spoke of *soirées*, and one suspected she meant those mediæval evening receptions that still persist on the West Side. Their hostesses ranked as *society leaders*, and then they all sat down to a *collation*. It was a *swagger* evening, one learned from Miss Freedlark, and everything was just *recherchée*! But through it all the dark, stony visage at the table's head sat plunged in dark, self-

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absorbed rumination, the heavy eyes looking up, and the massive frame stirring only when the chatter pitched itself into sudden, ecstatic shrillness.

Presently the flow of words swept toward the upper realms of the chosen field of inspiration. Miss Freedlark mentioned other names, and they were the names of *bona fide* gods and goddesses of the worshiped Olympus, not petty imitators mured away in the side streets, where they ate out their hearts in envious apings of that other set. She mentioned the real thing. The Four Hundred! The Upper Ten! ! The Big Bugs! ! ! The Nobs! The Toffs! The Regular Swells! The kind that she would have more than eaten her heart out to know! The kind Mrs. Pinchin, too, had tried desperately to reach and had never known how to do it. The heavy eyes raised themselves; the talker saw that moment's gleam of interest, and rose to it inspiredly, naming other gods and goddesses not only by their names, but by their nicknames, too. It was Mame-this and Sallie-that. It was Fannie and Tessie and Lou. Their brothers and lovers and husbands were Tom-this and Dick-that and Harry-whatnot. Poor soul! The woman seemed to live on it, rolling the names with an unctuous familiarity under her tongue, and prostrating herself in worship of her idols. Mrs. Pinchin stared at her, as if enthralled; then her shoulders quivered with an uncontrolled shrug of irritation. Once she moistened her lips, curling them into a sneer. A little later she grunted. Miss Freedlark kept on, absorbed now, for her own sake, in the orgy of re-

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created visions. 'A change swept over Mrs. Pinchin's moodiness.

"Hunh!" she drawled, her face convulsed into a shocking leer of contempt; "personal friends of yours, ain't they? Know 'em all intimately, I guess."

Miss Freedlark's mouth opened. Speech was smitten from her as if in punishment of uttering sacred names in vain. She blushed furiously; then the color drifted out of her skin, and a startling pallor blenched it. The insult had found its mark; it had been chosen with a savage cruelty, nicely calculated to stab the victim to the quick. Miss Freedlark, squelched, buried her eyes in her lap.

Smiling beneath her scowl, Mrs. Pinchin pushed back her chair and arose, ignoring her withered guest as she turned to Corrie.

"Go see whether there's a hack at the door. Not my own carriage, but a hack."

The girl sped from the room, glad to get away from the barbarous scene. Mrs. Pinchin, relapsed into her ugly humor of silence, followed her into the hallway, and stood waiting with a hand on the stair rail. The faint smile still curled her lips mockingly under the scowl, and once she looked over her shoulder contemptuously, as if to stare at the dumbed victim of her rage — a wrath that seemed trembling to the brim in Mrs. Pinchin's soul.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" whispered Corrie to herself. "And she *stood* it! How could she?"

"Hurry up, you!" croaked Mrs. Pinchin, shaking her stick; "is the hack there?"

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Corrie looked out through the glass of the vestibule. "Yes, Mrs. Pinchin. There's a carriage at the door."

But oh! oh! thought Corrie; how could the woman swallow an insult such as that, and not resent it?

"You coming upstairs with me, Miss Freedlark?" grunted Mrs. Pinchin over her shoulder; "I've got some work for you."

Then Corrie knew; Miss Freedlark, too, was a paid servitor in that house, and had already felt the penalty.

But why had Miss Freedlark been engaged? What had become of Miss Maria, too? Where was Mrs. Pinchin going in a public carriage at that hour of the night? On other nights, when Mrs. Pinchin had gone forth, either to the theatre, to a concert, perhaps to her social grubbing, she had gone invariably in her own equipage. A rising wind rattled at the windows, and Corrie, in the drawing-room now, peered out at the sky. Overhead a dull skim of vapor leadenly reflected the city's blaze of light. Shortly it would rain. Mrs. Pinchin was going to brave the coming storm — and why?

Ten minutes later, the two women came down the stairs; Mrs. Pinchin in the lead, Miss Freedlark following mutely at her heels. In Mrs. Pinchin's hand, and half concealed by her flowing wrap, was a round package wrapped in heavy paper, — the bandbox, as Corrie saw. She made no effort to hold it out of sight; nor could she, hampered as she was with her stick and the box in one hand, the other hand fully

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employed in clinging to the stair rail. "Hey! a quarter of eight?" she exclaimed in a startled tone, as she looked up at the clock; "I must hurry. Take those things down to the carriage, Miss Freedlark."

Mrs. Pinchin's new assistant was heavily laden. Under one arm were two or three small bundles; in the other was a large pasteboard box such as tailors use, the same size and kind of box with which Mrs. Pinchin had burdened herself the day before. Where was Mrs. Pinchin going now with that box, and where had she gone with the other? More riddles! More puzzles! More mysteries!

At the door the commanding figure halted, turned, and leveled her stick at Corrie. She stared for a moment under her thick brows, and then noisily cleared her throat.

"Now, no tricks while I'm away. Do you hear?"

Shaking her stick in impressive warning, she lumbered through the doorway and was gone; and on the heels of her departure a flaw of rain burst patterning on the glass vestibule.

The door of the waiting carriage slammed; there was a clatter of hoofs and a passing rumble of wheels. Mrs. Pinchin had set forth on her mission, wherever her destination and whatever it all signified. In the hall the front door clicked on its latch as Miss Freedlark softly closed it behind her, and then the lady herself appeared.

She shuddered slightly as she entered the drawing-room, shivering, as if chilled by the inclement night. The moisture sparkled in her hair, her face was

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peaked and downcast, and on the tip of Miss Freedlark's large, prominent nose, a drop of rain still hung pendulously. It required only a glance to show that Mrs. Pinchin had kept her standing out in the rain until she was pretty thoroughly drenched.

"You are wet through, Miss Freedlark," said Corrie, going over to her; "can't I get you something dry to put on?"

"Me? Oh, I ain't sugar, so that I'll melt." She looked at Corrie with a covert suspiciousness, and began feeling her wet shoulders with a concern that belied the careless answer. "What do you do with yourself, evenings?" she asked with an affected uninterest. "Did you intend going out to-night?"

But notwithstanding her assumed unconcern and the idle tone of her question, Miss Freedlark was unable to hide the shrewd interest glittering in the corner of her eye.

"No," answered Corrie, with a growing knowledge of the truth, a guess at the reason for Miss Freedlark's presence in the house; "I had no idea of going out. Did Mrs. Pinchin say she thought I was?"

"Hey? — She? — Oh — why, no!" exclaimed Miss Freedlark, startled. She leaned over and tried ruefully to brush the dampness from her skirt. "Why, I'm wetter than I thought," she murmured. "Maybe you had better let me have something dry. I'm just sopping."

"Very well; I'll send one of the maids with the clothes. You're in Miss Maria's room, are n't you?"

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Corrie got a wrapper and a pair of slippers out of the closet on the top floor. They were Mrs. Pinchin's, a part of that lady's discarded belongings, and the closet was filled, like every other spare corner of the house, with just such things. For whatever Mrs. Pinchin could not pass on to Corrie or Miss Maria, she thriftily stored away with a jackdaw's covetousness.

Corrie rang for a maid, and Maggie appeared, growling at having to climb the stairs.

"Maggie, take these things down to Miss Freedlark. She's in Miss Maria's room."

"Oh, an' did she get soaked?" grunted Maggie, with a frank smile. "Sure, for all av me, I'd let her to be drownded in her own boots."

Corrie opened the door of her room. "And say to her I've gone to bed, Maggie. Please be sure not to forget."

Locking herself in, Corrie hurriedly undressed. To get into bed and to go to sleep would be the best way both to avoid Miss Freedlark's company and to forget the dispiritedness that had come over her. For there was no longer any doubt now; Miss Freedlark had been brought there to watch and to spy over her; she was certain of that.

She was lowering her light, when she thought suddenly of the album. There might be no chance to get it in the morning, if her spy were still on guard; she must get it now. But while Corrie debated undecidedly the stair creaked; she heard someone coming, and who that someone was, Corrie had n't

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the slightest doubt. Out went the light, and into her bed popped the girl, and lay listening.

“It’s me, my dear. Have you really and truly gone to bed?”

A muffled voice assured Miss Freedlark that such was the case.

“Oh, I’m *so* sorry! I came up to have a nice little cosy chat with you.”

The cosy chat, however, had to be deferred, just as Corrie had decided to defer all the other of Miss Freedlark’s premeditated chats, cosy or otherwise.

“Well, — if you say so. But I think you’re real disappointing.”

The footfalls departed; the stairs creaked once again; a silence fell on the upper regions of Mrs. Pinchin’s home.

Corrie felt too worn out to get up again and light the light. She shrugged down among the pillows, an arm above her head in an attitude of repose, and stared thoughtfully into the dark. But it was not of Mrs. Pinchin that she thought. Nor was it of Corrie *Who?* — and Corrie *What?* Neither that, nor the other nebulous dreams of the past, obscure and tantalizing in their haziness. Perhaps it was of something else — someone else? But the thought that came to Corrie was not a thought cloaked in the usual roseate panoply of love’s young dream. There arose in her mind the visual image of that moment when she lay in his arms, her face upturned to his and his lips hovering so close to her own. She felt her heart leap, as it had leaped then. In memory,

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his softening eyes swam down to hers; in memory, the arm curled above her head slowly moved and with her other arm, together stretched out into the dark toward him. There they poised an instant — wavered — then fell in despair to her side.

For love's young dream had snatched itself away — gone — withered in the blighting knowledge again that it was nothing but a dream.

For not even a name was hers to bring him. Poor Corrie!

The hours passed. In the house's remoter depths the hall clock chimed the measured intervals of time, and the girl, stretched miserably in her bed, one by one counted the hours wakefully. Midnight struck. The boom of the deep-toned chime below ceased, and stillness followed, — a profound moment, as if night waited hushed, a finger on its lips. Corrie stirred restlessly on her pillows. Her ear, with that strained intentness of one unable to sleep, engaged itself with every little noise; the creaking of the floor, the ticking of her mantel clock, the whisper of the rain on her window pane, or a sudden rattle of the glass itself as a gust surged against it. A train on the L road clattered past, its startling burst of sound drowning all other sounds as it drew by the street end. A moment later came a Columbus Avenue surface car, a flat wheel under its trucks pounding out a staccato, jeering refrain, disposed to murder even sounder sleep. Afterward followed a belated carriage, its horses' shoes clicking sharply on the wet asphalt. Then the carriage, the car, and the L

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train passed into the distance. The silence fell anew, more profound, more hushed and pervasive than before — a silence all the more still and solemn because of its creeping undernote, the creak of the floors, the small, deliberate ticking of the clock, the whisper of the rainflaws tinkling on the pane.

Corrie leaped upright, her eyes distended. Another sound! She heard it distinctly. Somewhere in the darkened halls below, the floor creaked — not once, but beneath a cautious tread. There it was again! Throwing back the covers, the girl sat up, her knees beneath her, and caught at her breath while she listened.

It came again. Drawing her nightdress about her throat, she slipped from the bed to the floor. Who walked below there in the darkened house? Corrie battled with the instant's panic; she must know. Cautiously, one foot trying the floor before her, she crept to the door. Her hand, feeling along the panels, found the key. With no betraying sound she gently drew the door open, and peered into the bulked gloom of the hallway.

Against the background of the stair-well a faint, swaying glow diffused itself and then withdrew. Silence established itself throughout the house again, yet the girl listening at her door was aware of a living thing below, guardedly moving in the dark.

Again the light! — it was stronger now. The shadows writhed themselves into fantastic, dancing shapes leaping monstrously; and a tread of the stairs creaked! Someone was on the stair! Shut-

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ting the door a little closer, the girl peered breathlessly through the crack, her lips apart, and her nostrils quivering, every nerve strung in torturing expectancy. Who came? The shadows, capering wildly, fled away before the growing luminescence; the bulked darkness of the upper hall narrowed to visible wall and ceiling, and still the light advanced, its reflection swaying drunkenly on the background of plaster. Then a hand appeared, a massive claw holding aloft a candle; a head raised itself on the stairway, and turned to stare along the level of the floor.

The candle's flame, guttering and unsteady, threw but a fickle light on the face of the prowling intruder. Who *was* it? In the pasty, staring whiteness of that mask two fixed eyes were set like holes burned in a paper scroll; the chin had fallen, and the mouth, abjectly loose and debile, hung open, working like the maw of a gasping fish. Then the eyes rolled upward to the whites, and through the night's stillness a stifled, choking whimper breathed, shrill in its utterance of misery.

It was Mrs. Pinchin, and she wept!'

A moment passed. The taper, flickering in the unsteady hand, moved from side to side, and was held higher, as the two sunken eyes glared into the darkness ahead, striving to pierce the shadows. They leveled themselves on the door at the hall's end, and the watcher lurking behind it shrank back dismayed. But Mrs. Pinchin moved on unaware. The candle was lifted a little higher; the bulky figure lurched itself

THE SOBBING ON THE STAIRS

upward another step. A sob racked her, and she rolled back her head, her face glistening humidly in the candlelight — wet — soaking — soaking wet.

For through the night's rain, it appeared, and unsheltered, unprotected, Mrs. Pinchin had come to prowl at midnight. Her turban, wound round with a rope of pulpy veiling, had sunk upon her head in a ruin of dripping silk and velvet; and beneath the wreck her hair escaped, streaming in dank, corded wisps against her face. Step by step, she heaved herself upward to the stair end, and there halted, one gripping hand sprawling upon her mouth.

“Urh!” she whispered, the moan wrung from her with all the profound debility of a soul in torture. “Ur-r-rh! — Ur-r-rh! — Oh, my GOD!”

Great tears rolled down her cheeks, as she dropped her hand from her mouth. She turned, and with her streaming skirts flapping against her limbs, dragged herself along by the balustrade. For an instant, the girl quaking behind the door, thought the groping figure headed toward her. But reaching the door of the garret room, where all the discarded flotsam and jetsam of her household was stored, Mrs. Pinchin laid her hand on the knob, raised her candle overhead, and slowly disappeared.

“Oh! — *she knows!*” gasped Corrie; and pressing her own door to, she turned and thrust all her weight against it.

But that creeping night-prowler beyond had no thought of molesting her. Through the panel came to the girl only the echo of the guarded, creeping feet.

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The rasp of a slyly opened drawer sounded once; after a pause, the drawer was as slyly closed; and the secret, wary feet came stealing back to the hall again, patiently slow in their wariness. Then, once more — again — once again the stifled, mouselike whisper of Mrs. Pinchin's misery keened thinly in the silence; and daring all, the girl drew back the door and looked.

It was as she had guessed. Mrs. Pinchin, her candle held aloft, was dragging herself down the stairway, the album clasped in her arm.

CHAPTER XIV

Beginning another day after an eventful night. — Mr. Stanton arrives early. — His rebuff of the jingle-scribbler. — Corrie determines on flight. — Mrs. Pinchin tries on a dress. — Miss Freedlark in her true colors. — Corrie's denunciation of the spy. — Mrs. Pinchin's dramatic threat to tell Corrie's history to Phil. — She admits she knows who her companion really is.

A WILD impulse came instantly to pursue the marauder — to regain by force of arms the stolen album. She sprang forward, the cry almost on her lips; then terror prevailed, for all in a moment, she recalled the face of pasty, staring whiteness — the eyes burning in that ghastly mask — the terrible passion of misery voiced in Mrs. Pinchin's whimpering sobs. Her knees, weakening, gave beneath her, and she clung to the door for support, blindly fumbling until she found the key and turned it. For what if the creeping figure lurched up the stair again, and divined of the watcher spying on her? Corrie slipped across the floor to her bed, quaking as the springs creaked to her weight, and dragged the covers around her. She shivered. She was chilled from her long vigil at the door — frozen by her terrors, too. And what could be done now? The album was gone, the one thing she counted on as a link between the known and the unknown — gone, never to be regained. Mrs. Pinchin had it and that was the last of it. For in

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Corrie's breast, the terror of Mrs. Pinchin now had risen to a deep and terrible respect. She shuddered, cravenly submissive in her fear.

That was a wakeful night at Mrs. Pinchin's — for the girl; perhaps for others, too. Along toward the dawn Corrie's heavy eyes closed in fitful sleep; she tossed among the pillows, starting at every sound, her uneasy drowsing troubled with dire visions. Still, she slept, lightly first, and afterwards in the fast, drugged unconsciousness of mental and physical fatigue. Then a knock sounded on her door; it was the waitress, Maggie, warning her that half-past seven had come; that another day had begun.

Mrs. Pinchin's closed door stared at Corrie as she came down the stairs; Mrs. Pinchin absented herself from the breakfast table. But Miss Freedlark was present, with an early morning, unaffected sprightliness in quick contrast to poor Corrie's pale dejection. As if blissfully unaware of the girl's absorbed quietness, she prattled away condescendingly, arrogant again, now that Mrs. Pinchin was not there to repress her; free and easy in her officious self-assertiveness. Indeed, her confidence reached the point where she no longer made any bones of hiding her employment in the house. "You know, my dear, it would n't surprise me in the least, if I was to be with you quite a little while." This confession she accompanied by another of her bony smirks, another of the swanlike curvettings of her scraggy neck. "Would n't it be just fine for us if I was?" she suggested, in this manner affably including Corrie in her

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own patent satisfaction. "What chums we'd be, would n't we? Well, we'll be that anyway, even if you do have to leave. You'll find me a splendid playmate — just splendid!" cried Miss Freedlark, in a perfect rhapsody. "Yes! — now won't it be fine — and, by the by, you and that friend of yours — you know the one I mean — the one that was with you yesterday. Some day when I am not busy, you and she must come and take me out for a ride in her pretty carriage. What did you say was her name?" asked Miss Freedlark, spryly.

There was no way by which Corrie could very well dodge so point blank an attack. Silence would not aid her; for Miss Freedlark had leaned forward with a mincing smile, attentive, perhaps insistent. But Corrie's eyes, roaming about helplessly, caught a swift glance from Maggie, the waitress.

"Mush?" demanded Maggie, and thrust the dish under Miss Freedlark's face.

"Eh — oh-h — what-say? I have n't finished what I have."

As Corrie gulped the last of her coffee, she was aware of Maggie poised behind Miss Freedlark with her face spread in a wide and delighted, impudent grin. Corrie had no appetite; she would have fled, anyway.

Drifting down the hall, she wandered into the drawing-room. The shades were up; the night's rain had passed, and all the world outside sparkled in the glare of sunshine. But there was no sunlight or sparkle in the girl's leaden breast. Hopelessly cer-

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tain that Mrs. Pinchin held the whip-hand at every turn, convinced that her own efforts were in vain, she was ready to give up the struggle — all the more ready when she remembered her oppressor's significant words of the night before, the warning that if Corrie persisted, there would be an awakening such as she had never dreamed. But why had Mrs. Pinchin stolen the album, just as she had stolen everything else from Corrie? Why had Mrs. Pinchin done that unless there were some vital, powerful reason to make away with it? And how had she learned its secret hiding place? Corrie caught her breath. Had the Freedlark woman been responsible? Had the spy, paid to watch her, smelled it out? The girl's wrath sprang up at the thought, raged a moment, and then burned itself away. What did it matter, after all? Corrie, listlessly ruminating, was turning away from the window through which she had been staring morosely, when a hansom cab rattled up to the curb and drew rein at Mrs. Pinchin's door.

Mr. Stanton again, and once more in un-Chesterfieldian hurry!

Before the cab had come to a halt, his foot was on the sidewalk and he was hurrying towards the steps. Corrie, seeing him, tried to shrink behind the curtains unseen, but Mr. Stanton detected the movement. He looked up, and when he saw who it was, for the least possible fraction of a second, Mr. Stanton halted irresolutely. Then, with a faint, derisive grin, he came on up the steps, and the girl heard the rattle of his key in the latch.

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"Ah! the dear young girl!" cried Mr. Stanton with his usual, subtle mockery, as Corrie tried to hurry away from him down the hall. "Are you really hastening off without a 'Good morning,' even?"

"Good morning, Mr. Stanton," answered Corrie, dully.

"Come; now that's much more cheerful!" declared Mr. Stanton, benignly. "Let's shake hands on it, too," he suggested, and solemnly extended his own, as he advanced towards her.

"You wish to see Mrs. Pinchin, don't you?" Corrie inquired, ignoring the outstretched hand. "I'll send word to her that you are here."

Though Mr. Stanton had appeared to be in a towering hurry at first, he now seemed a little less in haste. Corrie, already at the stairs, stood with her hand on the balusters, and reaching forward, Mr. Stanton, with an unexpected movement, grasped it caressingly. "Why are you running away? Not vexed with me, are you, my dear?" he asked plaintively, and tried again to press her fingers gently.

It was while Corrie was struggling to snatch her hand away that a third figure introduced itself into the tableau; namely, Miss Freedlark, whose brows raised themselves in knowing significance, as if realizing the state of affairs.

"Oh! I trust I don't intrude!" she exclaimed, with an indulgent shyness meant to suit what she had romantically conceived the situation to be.

Corrie, flushing shamefully, dragged away her hand, and Mr. Stanton turned. If he recognized Miss

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Freedlark, there was no hint of the knowledge in his elevated brow — in the cool inquiry of his gray, supercilious eye. Corrie seized the moment's opportunity to run up the stairs, but at the floor above she was unable to resist the inclination to hear what happened below.

“Oh, how do you do, Mr. Stanton!” Miss Freedlark gurgled; and then, perhaps because of the blank indifference of Mr. Stanton’s expression, “Don’t you remember me? I’m Miss *Freedlark!*”

“Miss Freedlark? — ah, to be sure!” echoed Mr. Stanton, with no awakening response in either tone or manner.

“Why, don’t you remember? I met you in the drawing-room. Mrs. Pinchin introduced us. I read a poem.”

Mr. Stanton delicately combed his silky side whiskers through his finger tips. “A poetess! — why, fancy!” he drawled leisurely. “And since when did Mrs. Pinchin attach a poetess to her retinue, may I be tempted to inquire?”

It must have been his tone, rather than his words themselves, that awoke the woman to the insolence of the question. Like all other impertinently prying natures, she was sensitively quick to feel insolence when it was directed at herself. Corrie, in fancy, could almost see her writhe.

“You wish to see Mrs. Pinchin?” observed Miss Freedlark, in icy tones. “She has, as yet, not risen.”

Mr. Stanton’s practiced drawl resumed itself. “Ah — as yet not risen? — Indeed! — As you im-

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agine, I do wish to see Mrs. Pinchin — that is, if it quite meets with your convenience — and approval, Miss — ah! — Miss Fishhawk."

There was no reason to believe, from the clearness with which it was spoken, that Mr. Stanton meant the name for anything else than a burlesque. She did look like a fishhawk, and Corrie, stung with a shameful pity for her, sped up the stairs, determined to hear no more. The end of it, nevertheless, reached her as she hurried on.

"Freedlark, if you please — Freedlark is the name!" corrected the icy voice, more icily. "What is your business with Mrs. Pinchin? I will take whatever message you have for her."

Then the climax came abruptly. There was no longer any subtle concealment of mockery and insolence in Mr. Stanton's tone as he raised his voice in answer.

"Oh, the deuce you will!" he cried, as if his temper, strained too far, had snapped under the strain. "When I require your interest in my behalf, I'll apply for it — do you understand? Now flit back to your jingles, madame!" sneered Mr. Stanton; "for I'm going upstairs to see your mistress without either your aid or your interference!"

And with no further ado Mr. Stanton sprang up the stair, gained the floor above, and, with an imperative knock, loudly announced himself to the lady mured within.

Astounded to the point of dismay, Corrie reached her room. Who was this Mr. Stanton, and what was

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his place in that house? What were his rights, indeed, that he should thrust himself like this into the midst of Mrs. Pinchin's privacy and repose? Day by day, hour by hour, the coil of mystery had thrown itself into a tangle now far beyond any effort of hers to unravel. But whatever it was, she realized instantly now, and with a decision which admitted no further temporizing on her part, that this house no longer offered a shelter under which she could remain with dignity — no, with decency — either with dignity or decency.

But how could she escape undetected? It was a thought more pregnant in her mind, at the moment, than the thought of where she could go, once she did make her escape. She dragged out a change of clothes — all she would be able to carry with her in her flight — tossing them helter-skelter on the bed. What would happen when they saw her trying to get away? Miss Freedlark was watching below; she would see Corrie and her bag, and at once sound the alarm. But never mind! She must take that chance. Her bag was in the storeroom; she must get it at once. Opening her door, Corrie hurried down the hall, her footfalls as guarded as Mrs. Pinchin's had been when she had come prowling through the night. She reached the storeroom; her hand was already turning the knob, when up through the well of the stairway there came the muffled rumble of a voice raised high in exasperation.

It was Mrs. Pinchin's voice, and it thrilled with reckless anger.

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“—sheer idiocy! I said so— you made me ask him!”

That was all. The words, fragmentary, disjointed in their sense, broke off, as if the owner of the towering voice had been discreetly warned. Sheer idiocy! Yes, it must have been that, if Mrs. Pinchin's angry accusation held any weight. But what was sheer idiocy, and why was it that, because someone had been asked? Who asked who — and what was it they had asked? “Oh —” exclaimed Corrie, petulantly, and shoved open the storeroom door.

She was still rummaging after the bag when she heard Mrs. Pinchin's door open, and the sound of Mr. Stanton's drawling voice. “Do you think I 'd be here, if it was? Ta ta! You 're making a mountain out of a molehill, that 's all.”

With these ambiguous words Mr. Stanton went on down the stairs, and the stiff thwacking of Mrs. Pinchin's cane resounded.

Corrie listened. The heavy, lurching footfall thudded around the floor below, passed distantly, and then returned. Mrs. Pinchin's door slammed, as she closed it; Mrs. Pinchin had immured herself again. Plunging into the gloom of the storeroom, Corrie, reassured, groped around for her bag. She had forgotten where last she had seen it, and the search prolonged itself. Perhaps it had been put on top of the trunks. She climbed on a chair and looked; the bag was not there. Scrambling to the floor again, Corrie probed deeper into the gloom. There she found it, lying wedged in between a bureau and the wall.

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All her strength was required to drag it out, and panting with the exertion, she lifted it up and went back to the hall.

There stood Mrs. Pinchin, both hands on the cross-bar of her stick, and leaning forward to watch her.

Her face had settled itself into the fixed solemnity of an owl's, — an aspect still closer because of her arched, Jew-like beak, the drooping mouth beneath it with the lips thinly compressed, the flat flabbiness of her cheeks, and her eyes' rounded glare. Corrie watched her helplessly, and Mrs. Pinchin was the first to speak.

"What are you doing?" she asked in a controlled voice.

"I — I'm — I was looking for my bag."

"So I see," remarked Mrs. Pinchin, with no expressed interest in the reason that had led Corrie to look for it. "You are also intending to go out — to skip out, I should say — the way you did yesterday and the day before. I presume you have that in mind," added Mrs. Pinchin, with subdued mockery in her voice. She kept on staring at the girl, her hands still clenching the handle of her cane. "Well, we'll discuss that later. But in the meantime," she said, in a voice that signified it would brook no contradiction, "you'll come downstairs, and do the work I have for you. When it's finished, there will be time enough to argue your own affairs." Mrs. Pinchin raised her stick and pointed to the stairs. "Drop that bag and go down those stairs," she ordered, each word uttered with a slow and ugly, separate distinct-

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ness that betokened the nature of her mood. "Do you hear?"

Corrie bent her head and went.

"One moment!" called Mrs. Pinchin, as if in after-thought; "where are your hat and coat?"

The girl raised a trembling hand and pointed to her room.

"That's all. Now go on."

Mrs. Pinchin's heavy tread dragged along the upper hall; Corrie heard her close the opened door, and the key grated harshly in the wards as she locked it. Then, after a final rattling of the knob, as Mrs. Pinchin made sure the door was securely fastened, the thump of the cane renewed itself. Mrs. Pinchin reappeared, a grim smile on her face.

But once she had closed the door of her room, her manner underwent a change. "Well — now, my child!" she croaked with a sudden joviality and cheerfulness, as disconcerting as the mood of ugly warning; "since we've got a lot to do, we might as well begin — what d' you say?" Chuckling unnaturally, she bobbed over to the closet, dragged the door open, and propelled herself inside. Corrie wondered dully what was in the wind. "Here you are, now!" cackled Mrs. Pinchin, reappearing with an armful of silks and satins, a piled-up freight of gowns, flounced and furbelowed, lace-trimmed and plain. "See all the work we have!" she cried, and jocularly clucked her tongue, leering at Corrie while she spoke with a forced indulgence and good nature. "I guess it'll keep us going for a while, anyway. Did you ever

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see such a mess as my things are in? I declare they 're only fit to throw away."

But as if fearful she had n't provided enough work for the day, Mrs. Pinchin tossed the dresses on the bed, and plunging back into the closet, emerged with a second assortment. "Here we are now — anyway, I guess it 'll be enough to begin on."

Corrie wonderingly submitted. Nor had she strength left for anything else than surrender. Chuckling and grinning, and wheezing gaily, Mrs. Pinchin led her to a chair by the window, and began dragging one dress after another off the bed, and piling them on Corrie's lap.

"What! you have n't your sewing bag? Never mind; you can use mine. Now this old crêpe here." Mrs. Pinchin snatched it up, and squaring off a step, draped it in display over her massive limbs. "Look at it!" she commented; "a regular scarecrow — all trimmed with dull lace, too! The idea of a fool dress-maker making a fright like that for a woman without a gray hair in her head!" Mrs. Pinchin turned up her nose whimsically, and again clucked her tongue. "Pull it all to pieces. Rip it right apart. That lace can go. We 'll have a rosette here — and another here — and one there — and so on. Those last ones you made were rather good. Three on each side of the revers will do. Out of pink ribbon. No, make 'em out of baby blue."

Mrs. Pinchin threw down the dress, and snatched up another. "Now this plum-color brocade. Look at here! — you see what I want done with it? People

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must be tired seeing it on me." She paused long enough to help herself to a stuffed prune from a box on her dressing-table, and with her mouth full, went on mumbling her directions. "These berthas are kind of out of style, ain't they? Anyway, they are, if they ain't trimmed with ruffles. Rip it all off — every bit of it. I 'll show you what I mean."

Standing up before the pier glass, Mrs. Pinchin stripped off her dressing-sack. Her bust with its massive arms was revealed, clothed in French embroidery, and the top of a black silk petticoat blossoming with large plum-colored flowers. Utterly unconscious of the grotesque, she hobbled over to the closet, and drew forth a wide picture hat surmounted by flowing plumes. "Now just catch the whole effect, child," she directed, settling the hat on her head, and picking up the waist of the brocade evening gown. "It ought to be like this." To make her words clear, she tucked the collar under her chin, and smoothed down the discredited bertha. "Rip this all off, and put a few ruffles here, and then — "

A rap on the door sounded.

" — these sleeves, too. See who 's that rapping. The sleeves might be let out a little. Yes, I guess so, and then — "

Maggie stood outside in the hall. She beckoned mysteriously to Corrie, signaling with her head for the girl to follow her. As Corrie made no effort to follow, Maggie leaned forward, her hand held up to the side of her mouth, and her face spread in another

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of her wide and meaning grins. "He's at the 'phoone. Yer young man 'll be waantin' ye!"

"—cut Princess fashion," mumbled Mrs. Pinchin, backing to and fro before the glass; "with an insertion of panne velvet, and —"

Corrie slipped through the door and down the stairs.

"—gathered full," said the voice, and stopped short.

As Corrie reached the pantry door, Mrs. Pinchin, leaning over the balusters, was crying excitedly: "Miss Freedlark! Miss Freedlark!"

The girl snatched up the receiver and put it to her ear. "Listen — listen to me quickly. I have time to say only a few words. I can't get to you to-day. I don't know when I can. Oh, Phil — Phil! do what you can to find out!" A step came hurrying along through the dining room, and Corrie heard it. "I can't help myself any more! I can't get away from this house."

His voice rang back to her through the wire, the diaphragm of the receiver humming with its force. She cried back at him. "I can't, don't ask me — Oh, someone's coming!"

"Tell me why you can't. You must!" he demanded. He was still insisting, when a face peeped through the swinging door — not Mrs. Pinchin's, though it made little difference now. "Oh, you're telephoning, are you?" murmured Miss Freedlark, making no effort to retire.

Through the wire Corrie heard him still insisting

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for a reason. His voice, too, was filled with an undisguised concern. Miss Freedlark still looked on, plainly of no mind to move until Corrie hung up the receiver.

"Why can't you get out, Corrie? What have they done to you?" Corrie shook from head to foot before answering him, as she gazed straight into Miss Freedlark's face.

"Because I'm watched! Watched! **WATCHED!**" she cried back: "I'm watched — and can't get out!"

Dropping the telephone, Corrie swung around on the eavesdropper, her face white and her hands clenched to her side.

"What do you want? — Was that it? — Now go and tell Mrs. Pinchin if you like!"

But there was no need for the tale-bearing; a furious thumping on the stairs warned of Mrs. Pinchin's approach. She came through the dining room, thrusting Miss Freedlark roughly aside, and gripped Corrie by the wrist. "Come; I'll settle with you now!" she muttered. Her grip tightened on the girl's arm, and Corrie, dazed and unresisting, went with her. Together they gained the room above; Mrs. Pinchin pushed her inside and followed. "Sit down," she said, and Corrie fell upon a chair.

Mrs. Pinchin's face had turned white again. She was breathing stertorously, her huge frame shaken by it, and one hand clutched tightly at the breast of her dressing-sack, which she had again put on. But presently speech came to her, choking and difficult.

"You're going to defy me, are you? You're still

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determined to keep on?" Mrs. Pinchin dragged her brows close together, and leaned closer to the girl. "Yes, I see you are. But I know what you're up to — I know — and you won't be warned? Is that it, hey? Well, listen!" she cried, growling out the words. "I won't tell you what you're trying to find out — no; for I've tried to shield you from that for years. My God! but I've been patient with you! I won't tell you even now, though I know who you are — yes, I know all about you, girl. I won't try to hide that from you any longer. But I'll tell you what I *will* do. Say the word — tell me you want me to, and I'll *send for him!* You know who I mean — if you're willing, I'll send for that young whipper-snapper. I'll tell him what I know about you — who you are — and whether you have a name or not! I'll tell your young Mister Philip Geikie all that he wants to know — *and more!*" shrilled Mrs. Pinchin, stamping the floor with her cane. "Then if he has the face to tell it to you, let him — aye, let him, do you hear?" she croaked; "though to my belief, I don't think you'd ever see him again!"

"Oh!" gasped Corrie, in a frozen voice.

Mrs. Pinchin lifted herself by her stick. "Come, is it a go?" she demanded thickly; "shall I send for him?"

CHAPTER XV

In which Corrie tries to decide whether ignorance is bliss where it is folly to be wise. — Dressmaking as a balm for unhappiness. — The plum-colored brocade. — The lady at the door. — How Corrie was kidnapped from Mrs. Pinchin's. — Why nothing made any difference to Phil. — The kiss of good-bye. — Randolph Tollabee's daughter is found.

CORRIE huddled down in her seat, and held fast to the chair's wide arms. Mrs. Pinchin's jaws were clenched together ; there was no moment's weakening pity in her determined eyes. "Hurry up!" she ordered, stamping the floor again with her cane ; "I 'm waiting for you to decide!"

The devilish ingenuity of the situation forced itself clearly on Corrie's mind. The chance had been offered her to learn the truth at last, but what a chance! — what a choice! Who but Mrs. Pinchin could have devised it? — to leave to him the decision whether she should be told the secret that might wreck all between them! Mrs. Pinchin's mouth curled into a faint grin of derision, as if she guessed the torment the choice had brewed.

" You 've got to make up your mind now — and do it quick. Hurry up, there! "

" Oh — oh, Mrs. Pinchin! "

The girl pressed both hands to her face, crying

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her appeal, yet knowing, before she uttered it, how hopeless it was.

“All right, then!” answered Mrs. Pinchin, stepping back, as if to go; “I ’ll send for him. I ’ll tell him what you and he have dragged me into telling. Then you two can do what you please between you. Mind now; don’t you come crying back to me, though!” she warned, shaking her stick at Corrie. “I suppose you think he ’ll stand by you. All right! You can think what you choose. Maybe he ’ll be willing to give you his own name. Yes!” cried Mrs. Pinchin, laughing scornfully. “Maybe he will, and then — well, maybe his mother will be willing to let him. But suit yourself; I ’ve had my say. So now I ’m going to stop all this!”

But before Mrs. Pinchin could reach the door Corrie was there before her. She threw herself against it, and shaking from head to foot, turned to make a final appeal.

“No! — no, no — you must not! I won’t let you do it. Give me time to think — just a little time. Oh! oh, Mrs. Pinchin! Can’t you see what it means to me?”

Leaning against the door, she threw out her hands in appeal, hunting — though with no degree of hope — for some sign of compassion in the unfeeling, mocking eyes.

“Oh! so *that’s* the way you feel about it, is it?” inquired Mrs. Pinchin, seeing clearly that it was indeed. “You ’d like to know it yourself, but you don’t want *him* to be told? Don’t fool yourself, my

KIDNAPPED FROM MRS. PINCHIN'S

girl! Young men don't moon around these days like kitchen heroes, marrying the first nobody they come across. You 'll not keep your secret from him, and hope to get a husband into the bargain. Agr!" she grunted, with a gust of scourging contempt; "to think of you two gawking fools putting me to a bother like this! It 's abominable! Yes! you two trying to drive me into a corner, and making my life miserable. Oh! good Lord!" grunted Mrs. Pinchin, and threw up her hands in disgust.

Corrie waited until she had finished. "Give me a little time to think — you will, won't you? You won't be so heartless and cruel as to tell him now? Let me see him once again, Mrs. Pinchin, and then you may do what you wish. It won't make any difference after that. Say you will do that — promise me, won't you, Mrs. Pinchin? Promise that, and I 'll do anything you tell me!"

Mrs. Pinchin walked leisurely to the table beside her bed and helped herself to a caramel. There was a pause while she slowly peeled off the waxed paper covering, and put the candy in her mouth and licked her finger tips. "Um-mh!" she mumbled, reflectively chewing while she spoke; "you 're not so cocksure now, as you were, are you — not quite so certain about yourself, eh? Say; — look at here: what was it you and that young cub had all figured out? Tell me; I 'd like to be in on the joke." Mrs. Pinchin licked her finger tips again, and grinned at Corrie almost good naturedly.

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But Corrie only shuddered a little, and made no effort to reply.

"Hunh! Well, you need n't bother to answer if you don't feel like it. A nice mess you'd have made of it, too, if I'd let you go on. But I was n't going to let you — well, I guess not. I've just been waiting for a good, solid chance like this to put a stop to it. And I think I have, have n't I?" she asked with a quick side look at the cringing girl. "Well, anyway, I was n't so simple that I'd let you go on willy nilly without saying something. No, not after all the years I've spent in trying to hide it from you — I mean, trying to save you from it," Mrs. Pinchin added, correcting herself. "Why, look at here," she demanded hotly; "do you know where you'd be if I was n't kind to you, and ready to put myself to a lot of bother for your sake? Do you know where, you ungrateful, deceitful child? You'd be down in the kitchen washing dishes with the servants. That's where you'd be, do you hear?"

Corrie looked up at her sadly. "Possibly; you seem to know, Mrs. Pinchin. But I'm not going to ask your kindness much longer. The other night I told you I'd stay here until I learned who I am. My mind has changed since then. I'm going away as soon as I can. You won't be bothered with me any more."

Mrs. Pinchin threw back her head, and looking at Corrie through half-closed eyes, smiled mockingly.

"Huh! huh! — So you still think he'll take you.

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**Make up your mind once and for all that he *won't*.
No, — I 'll see to that myself."**

"Yes, I think you would, Mrs. Pinchin," answered Corrie, slowly, after a look at the contemptuous, sneering face. "But I 've given up all thought of that now. I shall never see him after I leave here — *oh!* — But I 'm going to leave this house, anyway."

"You 're going to leave? Well, we 'll see about that, too. There 'll be plenty of time — plenty of time. And now that we understand each other, you come back to your chair and sit down. I want this sewing finished — and no more words about it, either." She stamped her way across the room again, and picked up the plum-colored brocade. "Here, begin on this," she ordered gruffly; "I 'll need to wear it Sunday night."

All thought of rebellion had died in Corrie's breast. She came listlessly at Mrs. Pinchin's bidding, and took the dress in her hand.

"Sit down, now," commanded Mrs. Pinchin, and Corrie sat down. "You understand about the collar — panne velvet, and the coffee-o-lay ruching. The velvet 's in the work-basket. Now, don't you dawdle over it, either, because I 've got to have it to wear."

With this admonition Mrs. Pinchin helped herself to another *bon-bon*, glared at Corrie, as if about to say something more, and, changing her mind, thumped out of the room with her face set in a sour, mocking leer.

Corrie picked up a pair of scissors from the work-basket. She dragged Mrs. Pinchin's plum brocade

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across her knees, and began to work, only half conscious of what she was doing. The scissors, held clumsily in clumsy, shaking fingers, worked blindly on, and reaching the collar, cut a long gash in Mrs. Pinchin's brocade. Perhaps it was just as well the exacting taskmaster was not there to behold this havoc. Corrie stared at the slit dumbly, and then went on. Work is a sovereign balm for trouble; yet there was no balm in that work of hers. She worked dully, and without consciousness of what her fingers did, her mind in despair. Mrs. Pinchin's plum-colored brocade was little improved by that half-hour's effort.

“Miss Cor-r-rie! — are ye in there?”

Maggie's head obtruded itself cautiously inside the door; her voice was lowered to a whisper. “Where's *she*?” asked Maggie, a warning finger on her lip, clearly with Mrs. Pinchin in mind. “Quick! — there 'll be a lady at the door askin' for ye!”

A lady at the door! Her mind, in its submerged dullness, could call to memory no acquaintance likely to ask for her at Mrs. Pinchin's. Who was it? Maggie, apparently of no wish to encounter her formidable mistress, had withdrawn her head as abruptly as she had intruded it. Corrie arose from her chair listlessly. Then there dawned on her who that caller must be! It was *Mrs. Geikie*! What had happened to bring *her* to Mrs. Pinchin's? Nothing — unless it were vital enough to overcome her established distrust and aversion of the woman she had never seen. Corrie flew down the stairs!

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But it was not Mrs. Geikie. The front door stood open, and there was Virgie Deane!

The instant she saw Corrie, she urged her, with a wild beckoning, to hurry faster. Corrie hurried. Through the open door she could see the Deane brougham at the curb, its footman standing beside it, and trying, without a great degree of success, to compose his wondering features into their usual air of solemnity. Nor could one dispute his right to amazement, since his mistress, wildly urging haste, was dancing from one foot to the other in excitement.

"Hurry! hurry!" called Miss Deane, in a stage whisper. Without wasting any time in salutations, she grasped Corrie by the arm. "You've got to come with me; Phil's nearly frantic. I did this for him, but I'm nearly scared out of my senses. Come along — hurry! hurry! She'll catch us if you don't."

Corrie gaped at her in astonishment. Why had they sent for her? She had forgotten her cry over the telephone that she was watched.

Miss Deane, in her excitement, ran to the steps and then ran back.

"Are n't you coming? They're all waiting for you, I tell you! Phil said to tell you he'd found out — he'd found out something — I don't know what it is. You've got to come! Oh, what if Mrs. Pinchin caught me!" cried the girl, and began hopping from one foot to the other again.

"But I can't. I can't get out!" gasped Corrie, infected with excitement too. "They've gone and —

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why — why, they 've locked up my hat and coat. I can't get my things!"

Miss Deane overlooked this astonishing admission, as if it were an everyday occurrence to have one's things locked up.

"Never mind them. Come as you are! Come along!" She seized Corrie by the hand, and tried to drag her down the steps. "Oh! — she 'll catch us, I 'm sure!"

Corrie suffered herself to be led down to the brougham, bareheaded and without a coat. "Back to Mrs. Geikie's, Scanlon!" breathlessly cried Miss Deane to the footman, and pushed Corrie headlong into the carriage. "Hurry, Scanlon!" she ordered, and snatched the door out of the man's hand. "Mercy' — 'e gone to sleep?"

But the footman, with an amazed grin, was really hurrying. "Oh! look there! I told you they 'd follow us!"

Miss Deane, quite pale and overcome, leaned back among the cushions. Corrie looked, and, at the head of the steps, stood Miss Freedlark, her mouth opened, and her eyes fixed stupidly on the brougham.

There was a clatter of iron shoes on the pavement; the carriage rolled away from the curb. Gathering himself together, the horse caught his gait, and went hacking along the asphalt.

"Miss Robinson! wait! wait!"

Miss Deane folded her hands together, and looked at Corrie helplessly. "Did n't I tell you?" she cried under her breath.

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"Oh, wait — wait! You there! Oh, coachman! coachman!"

The horse skipped in his stride, and settled back, as he felt the drag on his bit. Miss Deane sat upright, looked at Corrie, and then thrust her head out of the window.

"Drive on! Drive on, Higgs!" she called; and Higgs drove on, as ordered. Then, had one looked down Mrs. Pinchin's street at that particular hour in the morning, one would have been treated to the spectacle of a tall, angular female panting madly after a brougham, and screaming to it to stop, when the brougham displayed not even the slightest indication of stopping. But half a block from Mrs. Pinchin's, Miss Freedlark gave up the hopeless pursuit, and then aware, for the first time, of the many heads stuck out of neighboring windows, of the many pedestrians turning around to stare at her, of the many nursemaids, market-boys, icemen and other wayfarers, all grinning at the figure she made, she turned and hurried back to Mrs. Pinchin's.

"Well!" exclaimed Miss Deane, regaining her breath; "I'll know myself if I ever do a thing like this for Phil again! Mother would n't let me out of her sight for a year if she heard of it. Mercy! did you see that woman gallop when she came after us? She was screaming, as if we 'd run off with the family plate!"

Miss Deane burst into a little gale of merriment at the memory. "But what a lark! Just think of it! Why, it reads precisely like the books that Tillie, my

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maid, is always ruining her eyes over. 'Lord Valdemont seized the unresisting form of the heiress in his arms, and sprang lightly into the stirrup,'" cried the girl, with another peal of laughter, and then stole a glance at Corrie.

"Please don't. It's all right, I'm sure. It's all going to come out splendidly in the end."

Corrie shook her head, and tried with a little better success to smile. "It is n't that, Miss Deane. I wonder what I shall say to Mrs. Pinchin when I go back to her, after this — after running away as I did. Or, rather, I'm wondering what she'll say to me."

Miss Deane looked at her for a moment soberly. "Is n't she some sort of a relative of yours?"

Corrie nodded dispiritedly. "That's what we're trying to find out." She looked down at her hands, nervously twining and untwining her fingers. "Something has happened — I've found out something that makes me think so. I'm afraid she is," faltered Corrie in a troubled voice.

The other girl, who never in her life had known a moment's worry, much less a trouble like this, gazed at her sympathetically. "Why do you care, anyway?" cried Miss Deane, with all the exuberant philosophy characteristic of one that has never known a care. "I would n't let her bother me, whoever she is. Phil does n't care, — and," added Miss Deane, as if the fact itself were convincing, "well, if he does n't, I don't see why you should."

A little touch of pain stabbed Corrie's heart. She

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wondered, as she listened to the gay, buoyant girl beside her, what the same girl would think were she to understand all the conditions — above all, the circumstance that Corrie knew nothing about herself. But Miss Deane, unaware of the belittling thoughts that flocked through Corrie's mind, was rattling blithely on.

“ You should have seen Phil's face when I got there. Mother had sent me with a book she 'd promised Mrs. Geikie, and when I drove up, Phil had just hurled himself down the steps. He had his hat jammed down on his head, and I think he fully intended to descend on Mrs. Pinchin's, horse, foot, and artillery. Yes! as if he fully meant to sack and pillage it and let no soul escape alive.” She twinkled with merriment again at the memory. “ Phil, all in a breath, told me what had happened — about their watching you, I mean; and he declared — no, that is n't it; — he declaimed — that 's the *very word!* He declaimed — right like this: ‘ I 'm going to see her if I have to tear down Mrs. Pinchin's door! ’ ” To make her mimicry more impressive, Miss Deane struck an attitude, one hand in the air, the other thrust into the breast of her smart little jacket. “ I told him to keep still, and not be such a ninny. Phil is such a silly old goose when he gets excited. Now when I suggested I 'd go after you myself — you know, it 's all my own idea — why, Phil nearly lost his reason. He told me if I only would, he 'd love me forever. Hmph! ” scoffed Miss Deane, disdainfully; “ he can keep his love until I ask for it. But, anyway, that 's

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how I came to abduct you, and if mother ever finds out — well!"

In this strain she kept on until the journey's end, losing no chance to rouse Corrie from her fit of the doleful dumps. They rolled down through the Park along the drives arched by the tall trees just bursting into green, reached Fifty-ninth Street, and rumbled across the car tracks to the smooth asphalt of Fifth Avenue. It was too early for the usual rout of carriages, delivery wagons, and trucks that make of the avenue the most democratic boulevard in the world; they bowled southward unimpeded; crossed the barrier of Forty-second Street, sped down Murray Hill, and clicked away along the level, and, at the Twenty-third Street crossing, were held up only long enough to let a rush of early morning shoppers skip from curb to curb. Then they went on again, down through the defile of tall office buildings to the sleepy quiet of the lower avenue, where, at Ninth Street, they turned west along the trail of Mrs. Pinchin's Monday morning pilgrimage to the mean streets that fringe Greenwich Village. Here was the journey's end; and as Corrie looked up and saw Mr. Biggamore's house in sight, her heart leaped in her throat, beat thickly, and then subsided, a leaden weight in her breast.

Young Mr. Geikie, apparently, had passed an anxious hour. At the first sound of wheels in the street, he looked out, and then came running down to the sidewalk. Scanlon had sprung down from the box as the brougham turned in at the curb, but his

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services were not required. Phil, already, had thrown open the carriage door.

"Why were you so long? I thought something had happened!" he exclaimed. Then he saw that Corrie was without hat or coat. "Something *has* happened, or you would n't have taken so long!"

"Well, I like that!" retorted Miss Deane. "I 've been gone hardly an hour. You ought to be glad to see us alive, instead of complaining about the time. No — I 'm not coming in now! I won't, — just to spite you. Besides," added Miss Deane, staring ruefully at the carriage clock, "mother said she 'd meet me at Aunt Olivia's at quarter of ten. I hope she will — it 's only eleven now. Good-bye! Tell Scanlon where to drive, Phil. Good-bye, and good luck!"

The two walked up the steps together, Corrie silent and downcast, Phil gravely watching her. In the hall he closed the door behind him, halted irresolutely, and then led her into the darkened drawing-room.

"Before we go up to mother's room," he said, standing before her, "tell me what has happened."

Corrie told him. She withheld nothing; no detail of the night and morning's happening kept from him — the watch that had been set on her, Mrs. Pinchin's departure with the bandbox, her return and the midnight alarm of Mrs. Pinchin coming like a thief to prowl in the dark of the storeroom. All this she recounted, while he listened, eager to hear every detail. The girl told him of Mrs. Pinchin's whispered

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sobbing, of her terrible passion of grief or trepidation, or whatever else it was, and there he nodded.

"Yes! I don't wonder at it. If I were she, I'd be pretty badly frightened myself — that is if what I suspect is true. You remember the advertisement? Well, I think somebody else besides you and me is on Mrs. Pinchin's trail!"

Corrie raised her eyes dully. "Why?"

"Because I've had an answer to the letter I wrote. It was a man who sent it; I can tell that from the handwriting, though it was plainly disguised. Whoever the man is, he's up to something serious. I can't say what, but it's something more than an ordinary business matter. He wrote me savagely to keep my hands out of the affair. It was a plain warning that if I did n't, I would stir up a mess that would make me sorry for interfering. That's all there was; now tell me what else happened."

Corrie went on with her tale. There was nothing left out — not even the shaming detail of the threat Mrs. Pinchin had used as a tool to shock her into submission. She repeated to him that morning's encounter over the sewing, and how she had pleaded, ready to do anything if Mrs. Pinchin would only promise not to go to him with her impressive secret.

"Phil, Mrs. Pinchin knows who I am. She has admitted it at last, and it's — Phil, can't you see? — it's something dreadful. I won't try to hide it from you — I mean, I won't try to keep you from knowing that it is dreadful. But, Phil — oh, Phil, Phil! — I

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don't want you to know what it is. I can't bear to think of you hearing it all. Can't you see why?"

He smiled, and shook his head reassuringly. "It does n't make any difference — don't worry over it, Corrie. I don't even want to know. Besides, I'm sure who you are, anyway."

She waited patiently, little hope in her downcast eyes.

"No, Phil; you don't know. It's all a mistake. You and your mother have been deluded into hoping it was true, until you have believed it. But it is n't, and, Phil, you understand, don't you, why I can't see you again. Don't you really see how it is? Everyone knows it is n't possible, — or right, Phil. Even Mrs. Pinchin says so."

He interrupted her quietly. "Corrie, you must n't talk like that. It's absurd. Do you or I care what Mrs. Pinchin says?"

"No, Phil — and I would not have cared unless your mother had made me understand the same thing, too."

He stared at her bewilderedly, as if wondering what she meant. Corrie enlightened him.

"Yesterday, Phil, your mother thought — and I thought so, too — that I was someone — perhaps someone with a name and a family. But from what Mrs. Pinchin has said — Phil, she never would have dared unless she *knew*! — why, I have been made to learn now, that I'm just plain Corrie — just Corrie and nothing else. Don't you understand why I can't see you any more?"

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He stirred uneasily. "Wait! — I don't know what mother has said to you; she won't tell me. Nor will Uncle Phil, though I've a pretty clear notion what it is. I suppose it was what I've been trying to keep from you until I was sure."

"About the Tollabees?" said Corrie, hopelessly; "yes, that was it. But it is all a mistake, Phil," she added, returning to the same, dreary phrase.

"Mistake or not — Corrie, listen to me!" He came close to her. One hand held her by the shoulder, and she stood without trying to free herself. "Look up at me!" he commanded determinedly. "Now hear what I have to say: you are going up to see mother; she's waiting to say something to you. I don't know what it is, but they've admitted — she and Uncle Phil — that they have proof who you are. As I've said, they won't talk to me about it, but from their admissions, I'm almost certain you're Dorothy Tollabee. Something turned up last night that makes me sure. Uncle Phil came in late, and he and mother sat whispering together for hours. Afterward, Uncle Phil went up to his room, and rummaged around a while. I could hear him pulling out the drawers of his desk, and poking among the boxes of papers he has in his closet, and then he came down again. He had a letter in his hand, and he gave it to mother without saying anything. She read it through, and then looked up at him and nodded. I could hear her say to him: "Yes, — that's who she is. I don't think there's a doubt left." Phil paused, and his hand tightened on Corrie's arm.

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"Look up at me now," he said, and held her so that he could see her face. "Corrie — whoever you are! — whatever they've found out! — Corrie, dear, it does n't make any difference to me. I won't let you go, no matter what happens."

She shook her head dolefully. "But you 'll have to, Phil," she answered, trying to smile at him in her woe. "What does it matter? You 'll forget about it in a little while, won't you? We have n't known each other long — think how quick it has all been. You must see how it is, Phil — this is the last time now!"

"I mean it. What happens will make no difference," he repeated, shaking his head gently, and smiling down at her; "don't you see why I mean it?" he whispered.

He was very close, his eyes fastened on hers, and as full with feeling as they had been during the moment in the Park. The grave look in their depths faded slowly, warming with another light, and in answer to its softness, the girl felt her heart flutter in her breast. Slowly his hand dropped from her shoulder, and unresisting, she let him draw her to him. It was the last time now! It was the parting! Neither he nor any other man should ever again hold her in his arms. This time she made no struggle against it. For what did it matter? There never again would be a time when she would have more than the memory of it and the pain the memory would bring. But now — He pressed back her head, and already she felt his cheek brush hers. She clung to him, weak,

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desperate, fearful at the thought of losing her love. And then came the blinding, withering thought again — the sense of her surrender, and what it meant to surrender so.

“NO — don’t! don’t! — *for my sake!*” she cried fiercely; “let me go!”

She struggled, but his clasp grew tighter about her form.

“Listen!” he whispered; “you know what I’ve told you — that you are mine, no matter what happens. Look up at me! Look up, Corrie!”

Then she looked up, as he bade her. Her arms reached out, and she clung to him, reckless of everything — desperately forgetting even the pain it would cost her, when only the memory was left. “Phil! — Phil! — boy! boy!” she murmured, and her lips touched his, all her love given to him in that one first — and last — signal of her longing. “Phil — *good-bye!*”

She freed herself, and drew back from him quietly. “Good-bye, Phil!” Corrie whispered again; “you see it must be that. Now, take me to your mother.”

He smiled at her again, lightly and confidently. “Not *good-bye*, because you’re *mine* now!”

If Mrs. Geikie had any suspicion of what had happened in the room below, her face gave no hint of it. She arose from her seat by the window when her son knocked, and came forward, her hand outstretched, and a kindly smile on her lips for Corrie. Perhaps the faintest bewilderment showed in her face when she

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saw Corrie was without either hat or jacket; Phil laughed as he pinched his mother's cheek.

"Virgie and I abducted her, mother," he chuckled; and then explained himself to the wondering Mrs. Geikie.

"Virgie did that!" she exclaimed in a shocked voice that showed no inclination to join in her son's merriment.

"Do you mean to say, too," she demanded, in amazement, "that Mrs. Pinchin held Miss Robinson a prisoner? I can't imagine such a thing. My dear," she cried, turning to Corrie, "will you tell me what they have been doing to you in that house?"

Corrie told her briefly. "It was n't really so very dreadful," she said, with a wistful little smile; "I think I must have alarmed your son by what I told him over the telephone. But I was nervous and excited, and I think I exaggerated. Mrs. Pinchin had hired a woman to watch me — you see, she'd begun to suspect what I was doing. In fact, I think she knew fully that I was trying again to see you, though I can't tell you where she found out, unless she saw me coming here, yesterday morning. But anyway, she had this woman to watch me — a Miss Freedlark; and though I'd suspected before why she had been brought into the house, I was n't sure until your son, Mrs. Geikie, telephoned me. Then I found out I was right in my suspicions, and it upset me. But that's all it was."

"All!" exclaimed Mrs. Geikie, indignantly; "I call it dreadful. But shameful as it is, Virgie never

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should have gone to that house. If you had told me, I would have found a more proper way of reaching Miss Robinson."

"Nonsense, mother!" Phil laughed again; "besides, it was the only way we could set Corrie at liberty."

His mother looked at him, as he spoke the name, but gave no other sign how it affected her.

"Will you sit here by me, please," she said, drawing up a chair for Corrie. "Phil, I wish you would call your uncle."

"Yes, mother!" Phil departed, and Mrs. Geikie turned hastily to Corrie.

"My dear, I must say something to you that I felt a delicacy in telling before my son. You remember what I said yesterday about the Tollabees? Both Mr. Biggamore and I thought it necessary to tell you because — well, Phil virtually compelled it. You know he is frank and impulsive; we realized that, and we were fearful he would shock you by blurting out the truth. He does not understand how serious a condition it is. I believe he regards it all as sort of an adventure, but, fortunately — my dear," said Mrs. Geikie, still more hurriedly, as she heard Phil and Mr. Biggamore coming along the hall; "I have no time to say any more. But remember, I have a sincere and natural interest in you now. Mr. Biggamore will tell you why. You will let me be your friend, won't you? No, don't try to say anything yet. You must wait; he will tell you."

Naturally the question that had come leaping to

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Corrie's lips was the one she had asked so often — of herself, of Mrs. Pinchin, Miss Maria, and even of these strangers. But Mrs. Geikie had turned away, and now was staring thoughtfully through the window.

"Good morning, Miss Robinson." Mr. Biggamore, visibly ruffled, had edged into the room, his eye fixed on his nephew in a kind of bumptious indignation. "See here, sir!" he cried, suddenly boiling over, and wagging his finger wrathfully; "did n't I warn you not to interfere?"

Phil smiled at him unaffectedly. "Uncle, if you 'll tell me what you are talking about, I 'll have a better chance to answer that question. What 's happened?"

Mr. Biggamore danced up and down before him. "Happened? *Happened?* Great deal 's happened! Stop laughing at me like that; I won't have it. Stop it, I say. Now what do you mean by answering that advertisement? Speak up! Tell me at once!"

Mr. Biggamore's hand reached for his wisp of hair, but at his nephew's start of astonishment he paused, and scowled at him frankly.

"Yes!" spluttered Mr. Biggamore. "Who gave you leave to answer my advertisement?"

Both Phil and Corrie stared in open astonishment.

"Uncle Phil, was that your advertisement? Was it really yours? Well, I never!"

"Mr. Biggamore!" exclaimed Corrie.

"Yes, I put it in. I did it myself. What 's that

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to you, sir? How dared you answer my advertisement without my permission?"

Phil felt no desire to laugh at the absurdity. He looked at his uncle thoughtfully, and then at Corrie. "It may sound almost like a joke, sir," he answered quietly; "but I wanted to find out about Corrie. The advertisement seemed to be a clue. I wished to find the Tollabees as well as you!"

"Hey?" It was Mr. Biggamore's turn on hearing this to look startled, too. He glanced nervously at Corrie, shifted his eyes, and then seemed to remember that she had been informed already of her presumable connection with the name. "Oh, yes; to be sure!" He controlled himself and glanced uncomfortably at his sister. "Laura, has Miss Robinson been told — about last night, too, I mean?" Mrs. Geikie silently shook her head, and once more Mr. Biggamore bit his lip, and tugged solemnly at his forelock.

Phil waited a moment, and as neither his uncle or mother seemed inclined to go on, he himself spoke.

"Mother — and you, too, Uncle Phil: don't you think you should stop this uncertainty, and tell what you've found out? Uncle Phil," he asked, turning to him, "did n't Randolph Tollabee leave a daughter?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Biggamore, gloomily, "he did!"

"Very well, then; that's what I thought. Now, why hide what you know any longer? Why not come out with it, and tell Corrie all there is to know? I don't think what you have to say will hurt her."

Mrs. Geikie moved restlessly in her seat beside the

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window; Mr. Biggamore pressed his lips together. A look of worry had come into his eyes, and he glanced at Corrie still more uneasily.

"Come," said Phil, urgently; "is it about the Tollabee fortune? I suppose you've heard that all the money's gone — that she's a pauper. Is that it? What's the odds? Why don't you own up to it? I don't think she cares a snap of her finger about the money."

"No — not about the money!" whispered Corrie, her eyes desperately searching Mr. Biggamore's face for some clue to the truth.

"Is that it, Uncle Phil?"

Mr. Biggamore wet his lips. "No — that is not it," he answered painfully. "No — but I have seen Miss Margaret Tollabee. I have seen her, and I have also seen Randolph Tollabee's daughter. It's all been a sad mistake. Miss Robinson is not she, at all."

CHAPTER XVI

In which Mr. Biggamore nervously mops his brow. — His story. — Miss Margaret Tollabee and the missing papers. — Mrs. Pinchin identified. — Corrie finds her mother. — Phil's delight and Mrs. Geikie's sorrow. — Stanwood Geikie's elopement. — Corrie also finds her father.

MISS ROBINSON," said Mr. Biggamore, gloomily, his chubby face wrinkled with concern, "I need scarcely say how much it distresses me to have to tell you this. The fact is, my dear young girl, we have been led into a natural, though extremely painful error; and now we must make amends for it if we can. But I've learned a great deal about this business. Sit down, I beg of you, if you please; and let me tell you what I know. You may as well hear it all."

He pulled out his handkerchief as he spoke, mopping his forehead nervously, and still thoroughly incensed at his nephew, as he showed, by the way he uncompromisingly scowled at him. "Huh! never heard of such a thing!" he snorted under his breath. "The idea! Huh! answering my advertisement!"

But Phil himself was too disturbed to pay any attention to the little gentleman's bumptious indignation. A good deal staggered by his uncle's revelation, he stood leaning on the mantel-piece, his troubled eyes intently fixed on Corrie. There was no

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thought in his mind but for her; yet one would have had difficulty in that trying moment to learn from Corrie's expression just how the revelation had affected her.

She sat looking at Mr. Biggamore with a queer, crooked little smile. Naturally enough, the shock had dazed her, though the blow was by no means so stunning as it would have been, had she overlooked the warning in Mrs. Pinchin's threat. Still she felt it bitterly, no matter how she had been prepared; and there settled on her mind, after the first moment of dismay, a feeling of dull and hopeless resignation. It was all past now — the dream and its appealing hopes — and she dared not look at Phil.

Beside the window, Mrs. Geikie still sat with her eyes fixed thoughtfully in the distance. As one saw from the trouble on her face, she, too, blamed herself for Corrie's new grief; and Mr. Biggamore, after a glance at her, began more furiously than ever to mop his forehead.

"Now, Miss Robinson," said he, darting a final glance of indignation at his nephew; "I've got to explain myself. You see, we ourselves have always wondered what had become of the Tollabee child, and when you told about yourself, and about all the curious happenings at Mrs. Pinchin's, we naturally enough jumped to the most natural conclusion in the world. Well," remarked Mr. Biggamore, slowly and with impressive regret; "it appears, as you see, that we made only a painful blunder. No," he added reflectively, "we never should have said a word to you

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about these Tollabees until we were certain of our facts — not a single word — not a single thing, my dear young girl. I shall never forgive myself for it!

“But you see,” he continued earnestly, “my sister and I knew you suspected some connection between yourself and that old friend of ours, Randolph Tollabee; so there was n’t much choice left to us. We had to set you on your guard — you see the force of it now, don’t you?” he asked awkwardly. “At all events, we thought it best to let you know we were investigating, and we also wished to warn you against the shock of too great a disappointment. My sister here — I think she spoke to you about it, yesterday?” Mr. Biggamore looked at Mrs. Geikie, and then energetically bobbed his head. “It was most unfortunate! Most unfortunate — but necessary!” he added convincingly.

“Well, I put in the advertisement, and yesterday I got an answer — not yours, sir! The idea! Impudence!” Mr. Biggamore got up, thrust his handkerchief into his coat-tails, and plumped down into his chair again. “As I say, I got an answer, and it was from Miss Tollabee herself. She wrote, saying that if the writer of the advertisement would identify himself, she would consent to see him. So I sent her a letter by messenger. She lives in West Tenth Street, just this side of Greenwich Avenue; and an hour later I got her reply, appointing the hour at quarter past eight last night. Well,” said Mr. Biggamore, after pursing up his lips, his face turned away from Corrie, “I went up to the house — she’s been living there

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since Randolph Tollabee died, you know — and the long and short of it is, that I saw her, and she showed me his daughter."

Corrie listened absorbed. "Did you see her — *yourself*, Mr. Biggamore? And there can be no mistake?"

He answered gravely: "There can be no mistake. I saw her myself. I would not be so sure now, unless I had."

"Yes, I suppose so," assented Corrie, dully. "And, of course, Mrs. Pinchin must have known this when she warned me." She sighed gently, her queer, crooked smile still unaltered. "Mr. Biggamore, there's one other question: did Miss Tollabee, by any chance, know of me?"

The little old gentleman, without removing his eyes from her, began awkwardly to rub his chin; and Mrs. Geikie, in her seat beside the window, stirred a little, as if she, too, weighed the girl's question with a knowledge of its answer, and what the answer would convey. "My dear young lady," faltered Mr. Biggamore, as if afraid to commit himself in a direct reply, "I can't answer that flatly. You see — why, to tell the truth, I don't know whether Miss Tollabee knows or not. The fact is," he went on carefully, "we didn't get down to the point of talking about it. I'd chosen a pretty trying time for her, I found out, to probe into this business. You'll understand me, when I tell you Tollabee's daughter is in a serious condition. Miss Robinson, she's not expected to live but a few days. Mighty embarrassing to me, too.

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I wondered what Miss Tollabee would think of it. Could n't be helped, though," muttered Mr. Biggamore.

"Then it 's quite hopeless, is n't it?" asked Corrie, in tired tones; "I mean trying to find out who I am?"

Mr. Biggamore got up and looked at his sister, and then at Phil. Then he jerked his head at the door in a patent invitation for Phil to clear out. Phil stared at him, but showed no sign of going; and once more Mr. Biggamore pursed up his lips. "Phil," he said slowly and with an impressive meaning, "I have something to say to Miss Robinson. Will you be good enough to leave us?"

Then Phil looked at Corrie, and still looking at her, answered. "No, uncle," he said slowly; "I don't wish you to think me disrespectful, sir; but unless Corrie would dislike it, I 'd prefer to stay. You see, Uncle Phil, there is a good reason I should hear, too, what you have to tell. I think so; that is, if Corrie does n't mind."

His mother, at the window, did not move. Her eyes were still fastened on the distance, and a little quiver of pain twitched at the corner of her mouth. Doubtless, in that moment, she knew that the ambitious house of dreams she had built for him had fallen in a ruin; for she heard now that he chose to build for himself. "Yes, let him stay, Philip," she said quietly; "I think he should hear it, too. It is best, perhaps."

"Corrie, dear, shall I stay?"

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“Yes, if you wish. It does n’t make any difference now.”

Mr. Biggamore heard the “Corrie, dear,” and after a confused and startled look at first one and then the other of the two, he jerked his eyes away, and stared at the carpet. “Oh!” he murmured, now for the first time enlightened; for, if the truth be told, Mrs. Geikie had not dared to confess even to him her disquieting suspicions of what had been going on between her son and this young girl, who so suddenly had brought her dreams to an end. But whatever the pain of it,—the pain every mother feels when first she learns other ties may cross even her own strong bond — whatever her pain, —she was at least just enough to realize the choice must be left to him. Phil must hear, and Phil must decide for himself.

“What have you to tell me, Mr. Biggamore?” asked Corrie, quietly; “will you tell me now?”

He raised his eyes from the floor. “Miss Robinson, I had no opportunity to ask Miss Tollabee flatly whether she knows who you are. In point of truth, it was n’t necessary. What I did do, was to ask whether she knew Mrs. Pinchin, and the answer in itself seems sufficient. She said she knew nothing of her. Could n’t say who she was. And to the best of her recollection, had never even heard the name before. So that settles it, does n’t it?”

As Mr. Biggamore, uttering this in emphatic tones, brought it to a finish, Mrs. Geikie turned and slowly shook her head.

“No — no, Philip!” she said painfully; “that

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won't do. Tell everything, and let her form her own conclusions."

So Mr. Biggamore thoroughly disliking the task, told everything, as his sister had directed, and Corrie listened, learning it all, at last.

"Well, last night," said Mr. Biggamore, mopping his brows again, "I went up to West Tenth Street and found the house. It was a plain, brick dwelling, rather modest, I thought, for people with the Tollabees' money. But there's no accounting for tastes, however, and then later on, I learned they had a pretty good reason for living in that dingy house in a dingy street. The fact is, all the Tollabee fortune is gone. Hmph!" Mr. Biggamore cleared his throat nervously, embarrassed again, since Phil's dead father had been accused of stealing this Tollabee money. "Well, I rang the bell," said Mr. Biggamore, "and as I stood in the vestibule, I could see someone dimly through the glass, moving at the further end of the hall. They took a precious long time about letting me in, too; and I had to ring again. Then the door was opened, and in the hall I saw an elderly woman — slight, a little stoop-shouldered, and, as far as I could make out, quietly, but well dressed — black silk, you know, and a piece of lace over her shoulders. She was n't anyone I knew, of course, because I'd never seen anyone of the family but Tollabee himself. Still, I guessed who she was; and 'Is this Miss Tollabee?' I asked her.

"She gave me a stiff little nod, and said it was. Pretty silent sort of a woman, I should call her, too,

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and not any too glad to be bothered by me. But, anyway, she showed me into her parlor, and after I'd found a chair, she sat opposite with her hands folded, waiting for me to open up — and, gad! I did n't feel any too comfortable, either, when I tried to get going. She would n't give me any help, but sat watching me curiously, — peering at me, you know, nearsightedly, as if she were trying to make out what I was after.

“ ‘Madam,’ said I, after I'd taken a look at her; ‘now you ’ll pardon me, but — hm-m-mh! — is this Miss Tollabee or Mrs. — ?’ Then I stopped, you know, because I disliked bringing in that — er — ahem! I mean that fellow’s name — well, Stanwood Geikie, if I ’ve got to say it. But she would n’t give me a bit of help; so I had to plump it out. ‘Are you Mrs. Stanwood Geikie?’ I had to ask her finally, and then she blinked at me a while, and slowly bent her head. ‘I prefer to be called Miss Tollabee,’ she said dully; ‘you doubtless know the reason why.’

“ Yes, I know well enough, though I did n’t refer to it; only bowed, you know. ‘Well, madam,’ said I politely; ‘of course you ’ll want to know why I put in that advertisement.’ Hmph! She just nodded at me dully, just about as cold and dumb as an oyster. ‘Yes, ma’am,’ said I, a little ruffled now, because I could see she was determined not to say anything until she found out what took me there. ‘Well, Miss Tollabee,’ said I, and started in to lead up gradually to my real business — this business about you, Miss

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Robinson. I had to go at it gingerly, you see. 'Miss Tollabee,' I told her, 'I've come about the old matter of the papers. Yes, ma'am.'

"The papers?" she exclaimed, sitting up, astonished: 'What papers do you mean?'

"So I told her. 'Don't you remember the papers Mr. Tollabee wrote us about? — your step-brother, ma'am. Just before he died, he sent word he had some papers to hand my brother-in-law. Madam, as you know, we never got those papers; and now I've come to ask whether by any chance you ever happened to find them.'

"No; it appeared she had n't found them — or so she said." Mr. Biggamore pursed his lips again. "I'm bound to say she was n't very polite about it, though. No!" he grunted, frowning; "you should have seen the woman. She would n't look at me, and she acted as if she'd like to bundle me out of the house, now that she'd found out, as she thought, what I wanted. 'Mr. Biggamore,' she said, half getting up out of her chair, 'I don't know anything about your papers. You might have written this to me — I have sickness in this house, and I did n't know it was about the papers you wished to see me. Is that why you came? Is that all?'

"No, ma'am, that's not quite all," said I, begging her to sit down again; 'I'd like to ask something else. It's pretty important, ma'am!' I lowered my voice then, because I thought there might be someone in the next room; and naturally, it would n't do to bawl out to them what I had to say. No, indeed!

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‘Miss Tollabee,’ said I, dropping my voice, ‘maybe your sister knows where those papers are. And will you tell me where I can find her?’

“Hmph! She did n’t seem to feel any desire to hide anything. Anyway, if there ’d been someone in the next room, her tone was high and sharp enough to be heard. In fact, she seemed irritated enough to raise her voice. ‘Mr. Biggamore,’ said she, loudly, and pretty nervous she was, too, I could see, by the way she hung on to the chair arms, ‘why have you come here to rake up an old trouble? What have you got to do with it?’ Hmph! It was as if she ’d really guessed I was only beating around the bush — well, as I was sure enough — and her voice, too, was like a file. ‘Madam, it ’s the papers,’ said I, sticking to my first story; ‘I ’d just like to be sure, ma’am, that your sister has n’t found them.’ Then she answered me, and that ’s where I found I was on the right trail.

“You see, I knew nothing at all about her sister. I did n’t know whether she was there in the house with her, or where she was. It was just a leap in the dark. Says she: ‘Mr. Biggamore’ — angry and resentful, too, as she had every right to be at my interrogation — ‘Mr. Biggamore, I don’t know where my sister is. I have n’t seen her for years.’ Hmph! It was as I ’d begun to suspect. . ‘Not for nearly seventeen years,’ she went on to say, moistening her lips and upset at having to admit it; ‘I don’t know what ’s become of her — and you have no right to meddle. You have no right to meddle!’ she

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cried, raising her voice at me. ' You have no right to drag up my trouble like this.'

" I had n't; that was a fact! But — ' One moment, madam, if you please,' I said politely; ' I dislike to worry you, but I 've really got to find your sister. Now, you don't know where she is but I think I do; only I 'd like to make sure.' Well, Miss Tollabee got up out of her chair and then sat right down again. ' Where she is? You have found her? ' she cried, and I could see that no matter how the two had fallen out, she 'd like to know where the other was, well enough.

" ' Madam,' said I, once she 'd caught her breath, ' have you ever heard of a Mrs. Pinchin? Do you happen to know the name? '

" I thought she knew at first. ' Mrs. Pinchin! — No, I never heard the name. I 'm quite positive it can't be. And even if it is, she can't possibly have your papers. My step-brother and she had n't spoken to each other for months before he died.'

" That was news to me though it all became clear enough, later, when I heard why the sisters separated. ' Madam,' I asked her, ' is your sister a large, dark-faced woman who walks with a limp? Tell me, if you please.'

" She sat down again and began to think. ' A limp — a dark woman with a limp? ' she repeated, and I began to see that the ordeal was getting too much for her. ' I don't know,' she said, ' how am I to remember when I have n't seen her for years? I don't know what she looks like now.' Then she

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struggled up in her chair and threw out her hands. 'Oh, Mr. Biggamore, is this Mrs. Pinchin — do you think she 's the one? Let me go to her for your papers — I 'll do it. I think I can get them. Oh, let me go and get her back to me. I want to get her back — I do — I do. I want to get her back and keep her, just as we were when we were happy together — just as we were when we were two young girls — oh, Mr. Biggamore! — won't you let me get your papers for you? I 've prayed God to bring my sister back to me, as she was, when we were two girls together.' "

Corrie looked up swiftly. "Tell me, please," she said hurriedly; "what did Miss Tollabee look like? Will you describe her for me?"

Mr. Biggamore thought for a moment. "She was a medium-sized woman, a little bent over, and very pale. I suppose that was because she was excited, though." Corrie nodded, and Mr. Biggamore went on. "She was quite near-sighted, as I 've said, and then — "

"And spectacles?" inquired Corrie, quickly.

Mr. Biggamore shook his head. "No, but I thought she 'd forgotten her glasses. Why?"

Corrie disregarded the question. "Was she very plainly dressed — dowdily, in fact? And did she have dull, light brown hair?"

Mr. Biggamore, puzzled, shook his head again. "No, on the contrary she was nicely dressed. The lace on her shoulders was quite fine, I should say,

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quite old and expensive. As to her hair, why — hm-m-mh — let me see. Oh, to be sure, — why her hair was very gray — almost white, in fact. Then she wore a magnificent diamond brooch at her throat, and her rings — well, they were beautiful. I got a good look at them when she reached out her hands at me, begging to get her sister back. But why do you ask?"

Corrie sat back in her chair with a little gesture of defeat. "It is n't anything, Mr. Biggamore. I wondered whether I'd ever seen her."

"Well," said Mr. Biggamore, going on with his story, "I quieted her down. She and her sister had separated over a pretty serious business; I don't wonder she was so upset about it. But time heals many wounds, and I could see she wished to hear about the other whom she had n't seen for so many years. Of course, I felt no doubt now of who Mrs. Pinchin was, and Miss Tollabee seemed to think so too — or, rather, she made no further effort to dispute it. Well, the point is, Miss Robinson, that I got down at last to where I began to see daylight in this Pinchin business.

"It was in this way: 'Mr. Biggamore,' said she, after I'd told her about the woman in Seventy-fifth Street, 'how did you find out all this? Who told you?' She was pretty solemn and worried about it now, hating to talk of her trouble, you see, yet wanting to hear all about her sister. 'How did you find out?' she asked, and I told her, lowering my

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voice because I'd heard someone in the next room. There was only a folding door between, and we would have easily been overheard. But Miss Tollabee told me to go on; the person was only a nurse and would n't understand what we were talking about. 'Well, ma'am, in rather a strange way,' said I, and I told her all about the curious happenings at Mrs. Pinchin's; how she 'd moved out of the house behind us when we came along, and about the album you 'd found in the garret, and the book with the Tollabee name in it; only I did n't tell her about you, you understand, Miss Robinson. I was holding back that business about the Tollabee child, so that I 'd have some sort of a climax — Hm-m-mh! — it was a climax, but not just the kind I 'd anticipated.

"Miss Tollabee was mighty interested. 'You have n't told me yet,' said she, earnestly, 'who gave you this information.' So then I plumped out with it.

" 'My dear madam,' said I, leaning back and grinning at her like a fool, 'the person who told me this, and the one who has the album, is Randolph Tollabee's daughter.'

Mr. Biggamore screwed his face into a rueful scowl. "Huh! It was ridiculous! — absurd! — a piece of imbecile tomfoolery!" he grunted, with another wry face; "I ought to have been ashamed of making such a clown of myself!"

" 'Randolph Tollabee's daughter!' repeated Miss Tollabee, looking at me, as if I 'd lost my wits; 'Randolph Tollabee's daughter, did you say?'

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“ ‘ Yes, ma’am; she’s living with Mrs. Pinchin! ’ I answered, nodding and smiling, and ready to enjoy her amazement. ‘ That’s where the girl’s been found! ’ But instead of what I expected Miss Tollabee gripped her hands together, and sat back staring.

“ ‘ Mr. Biggamore,’ said she, in a curious voice, ‘ Randolph Tollabee’s daughter is here in this house with *me!* She’s been here for years — and I don’t know what you mean! Why, the child has been in my charge ever since my step-brother died! ’ And so she had! So she had! ” exclaimed Mr. Biggamore; “ that’s all there is to tell.” And thrusting his hands into his pockets Mr. Biggamore sat back with a gesture of finality. It was his signal the tale was told, so far as he was concerned.

Corrie sank her chin into her hand, and thought; or rather, she made an effort to think. But though she had followed the tale with a close, absorbed attention, she had failed, so far, to grasp its full significance. The others silently detached, waited, all three with their eyes on her. “ So you saw her then? ” murmured Corrie, lifelessly; “ you saw Randolph Tollabee’s daughter? ”

Mr. Biggamore slowly nodded, his eyes still fastened on her in pity. “ Yes, — I saw her. She has been an invalid all her life — a cripple to tell the truth. Poor thing, poor unfortunate child; she may be dead even now, for when I saw her, she was not expected to live. Poor Miss Tollabee, too! She stood

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with the tears streaming down her face when she took me up to see Randolph Tollabee's daughter. I felt sorry for the woman. 'Pon my soul, I did.'

Another silence. Corrie sat again with her chin resting in her hand. Once or twice Mr. Biggamore moved uncomfortably, as if he wished to say something. But Corrie was the first to speak.

"Is there anything else — anything you have n't told me yet? If there is, I'd like to hear it."

Mr. Biggamore turned appealingly to his sister; as Mrs. Geikie caught his eye she made him an almost imperceptible signal; and Mr. Biggamore shook his head pleadingly.

Corrie saw it. "There *is* something else, Mr. Biggamore. Won't you please, please tell me?"

The little old gentleman mopped his forehead nervously. "Do you know who I am?" demanded Corrie, in a whisper shrill and distinct. Her eyes widened as she guessed the answer in Mr. Biggamore's appealing look at his sister.

"My dear child," he said, ponderously; "after the Tollabee sister went away to make a home for herself, she had a child — a daughter. Miss Margaret told me so just before I left her. I leave you to form your own conclusions."

A spot of color burned brightly for an instant on the girl's cheeks, and then faded as the pallor crept up in her face. "A daughter!" she murmured, her eyes widening at him. "A daughter! Mrs. Pinchin — a daughter?"

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Phil sprang toward her. "Corrie!" he cried, and at his exclamation Mrs. Geikie looked up and slowly and sorrowfully shook her head. "But, mother!" appealed Phil, impetuously; "this makes it all right, of course. We know who she is now; she's Mrs. Pinchin's daughter — and that settles it, does n't it now? But to think how that woman's treated her! Oh, it's abominable!" He stopped, bit his lip hastily, and looked at his mother with a sudden stare of inquiry. Whatever the glance conveyed, she paid no attention to it.

"Philip," said Mrs. Geikie to Mr. Biggamore, in a faltering voice, "you'll have to tell it all now; she'll find it out, anyway. You must tell her!"

Corrie, with a shudder of distress, raised a hand to her cheek, and breathed deeply. "Mrs. Pinchin *my mother?* — She! — my mother! *Mrs. Pinchin!* — Oh! but then how could she have treated me so? *How could she!*"

"My dear, dear child," said Mr. Biggamore, pityingly; "when the Tollabee sisters parted — when Mrs. Pinchin went away, why — well, my dear young girl, the fact is, she ran off with her sister's husband — with Stanwood Geikie. I'm afraid the man is your father."

CHAPTER XVII

Showing the undesirable result of discovering one's unknown parents. — Mrs. Geikie's sympathy and her appeal to Corrie. — How the course of true love may not only never run smoothly, but may even be brought to a dead stop. — Phil's determination. — The return to Mrs. Pinchin's, and what Corrie said to her. — Mrs. Pinchin's dismay at being discovered in a most uncomfortable rôle.

SO Corrie had learned; for here, at last, was the solution of the mystery — a parting of the veil — the key to her perplexities of Corrie *Who?* and Corrie *What?* All her dreams were rendered now in an answer that was itself a nightmare more grotesque and embittering than even the hopelessness of being left in doubt. Her mind, focussed on the truth that had at length been made clear to her, grasped the sordid reality with a despair that stripped her of the last shreds of comfort. She knew now — yet, in agony, cried out again for the past life when she had not known. Before realization withered all else, ignorance had, at least, allowed her to cherish hope, and now hope, like the phantasy of a dream, had been stripped from her in the awakening. She arose to her feet, her mouth drawn in the struggle of trying to hide the pain of it, and steadyng herself by her chair, the girl drew a hand across her brow. It was a gesture of dull, tired surrender; nothing was left to her now but to submit to what was given.

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"I understand, Mr. Biggamore. It's quite clear to me." The little gilt clock ticking on the mantel, with a preliminary whirr, struck the hour on its chime, and she turned her eyes to it confusedly. "I must be going now. I don't think I could hear any more now. There is n't anything to tell, I suppose? I must get home — back to Mrs. Pinchin's, because that's really my home, after all. She 'll be expecting me, and I 've been away a long while now."

Mrs. Geikie got up from her chair, and spoke to her softly: "But you can't go like this," she said, her face keenly showing her sympathy and remorse. Perhaps poor Corrie should not have been told. Perhaps there might have been some other way. Yet a moment's thought showed her the futility of hiding a thing like that. And after all, it were better the two knew now, this boy and girl, than to have the truth raise its ugly shadow later on. "You must n't go like this, my dear. Stay here with us a little while. I wish you to stay, and let me talk to you."

"No," said Corrie.

"But, my dear — Besides, you have neither hat nor coat; you must wait to let me send you home in a carriage." She looked at Phil, as she said this; and the young man, understanding, nodded back at his mother. During these few burdened moments, he had been trying vainly to read from Corrie's eyes how deeply the shock of all this had affected her; but Corrie studiously averted her face. She heard him leave his place by the mantel, and when the door closed behind him, she looked up again.

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"You can see how it is, Mrs. Geikie. I must go back to Mrs. Pinchin's, and begin all over again. Your friendship and all my small hopes must end here, because it would only hurt me to continue — and trouble you, too; don't you see it would? — if it all kept on." The older woman tried to say something, but Corrie smiled wistfully and shook her head. "No; — I can see how it is, clearly. I 've been carried on into dreaming I was like other girls, and now I 've got to learn I 'm not. You see, I 've never had the childhood they have, and when your son came and I grew to know him, I began to think that maybe I 'd have something to make up for all I 'd missed when I was a little girl. If I 'd had a childhood, and a home, and a name all my own, it still would have made me happy to think he cared for me. And to think he cared for me anyway, and then to believe everything was all right, it seemed to me, Mrs. Geikie, as if it really did n't matter about the past. I could afford to let all that go, because this new happiness was going to be so great that I 'd forget all the rest I had missed. Then I began to know it could n't be true. I was sure of that even before you and Mr. Biggamore told me, though I still clung desperately to the hope. It seemed too wicked to think I should be allowed to taste such joy, only to have it all taken away from me. But it 's so — it 's so. It 's all been taken away, as you can see; and now I must go away, and not talk about it, or think about it any more. It 's not meant I should get what other girls have, as I 've always realized. Now I must go back to Mrs. Pinchin's."

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“Mother,” said Phil, quietly; “Corrie can’t go away like this. We can’t let her go back to that house. You know what you think yourself.”

Mrs. Geikie looked back at him, her lips pressed together, and again the shadow of pain in her eyes. “Yes, Phil — and you still wish it?”

“Yes, mother,” he answered quietly.

Mrs. Geikie sighed gently, as if with the sigh had been rung the knell of all her ambitious dreams for him. “Miss Robinson — Corrie, if I may call you so, since my son wills it, you must stay here with us now. It will not do for you, after this, to return to Mrs. Pinchin’s.”

“Hey — what’s that?” ejaculated Mr. Biggamore, quite astounded.

Corrie raised her eyes. “No, Mrs. Geikie,” she said; “I am very grateful; but I must, indeed, go back there. I have been away now already too long a time. I must get back as soon as I can.”

Mrs. Geikie drew a deep breath; it was plain the girl had not clearly perceived her meaning.

“My dear, you do not understand. You are to stay here always — to live here until you and my boy have made a home for yourselves. That is what I mean. He has asked it; but oh, Corrie, Corrie!” she cried, rising and stretching out her hands to the girl; “you will try to make him happy — you will, won’t you? Because it is for his happiness — only for that — for his love for you, that I have given up so much. Try to make him happy, won’t you?”

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Corrie walked swiftly to her, and took the two outstretched hands.

"I understand — but I cannot!" she answered quietly; and at this, Phil started with a gesture of protest. But Corrie turned to him with her broken smile. "No, Phil — and you, dear lady — I can't let you make that sacrifice. I know already that I must not, happy as it would make me. I love your son very dearly, Mrs. Geikie; I think I shall always love him. I love him so, indeed, that I cannot burden him with one like me. It is very dear and great of you to ask me that, knowing, as I do, what you think of it; but I can't do it."

"Corrie!"

She turned to him, again with that queer, tremulous smile of hers, and shook her head. "No, Phil; I can't do it."

Mrs. Geikie leaned forward, and laid her hand on Corrie's shoulder. "My dear," said she, softly, "I think, if it ever happens you become my daughter, I shall be proud of you. Your answer now is not final, I am sure. You will change your mind."

"No," said Corrie; "I shall not change it. I love him too much. I cannot ruin his life."

"I know you do," said his mother, gently; "but it is not that. I know my son, and that is the reason why you will marry him. He will never give you up, my dear."

But Corrie was still determined. "No," she said, and so there it stood. Still further, she said it again,

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when Mrs. Geikie begged her stay a little longer and talk to her.

The grave, gray-haired, older woman dropped her eyes when Corrie finished; Mr. Biggamore, silently drawing in his upper lip, got up and drifted to the mantel. After elaborately staring at the clock, and then as elaborately consulting his watch, he twitched at his forelock thoughtfully, and wandered to the door. "Hm-m-mh!" said Mr. Biggamore softly; and the door closed behind him.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Geikie," said Corrie, restrained now, and only a little pale; "I am going."

"You won't wait? I wish you would let me talk to you."

"No, please. You have been very good to me; but I can't bear to talk any more."

Gravely, Mrs. Geikie waited, perplexed at what she should say or do, and all the more remorseful now — even more pained that Corrie had taken it so gently.

"But your carriage has n't come. Won't you sit with me until it is here?"

Corrie smiled listlessly. "I want to be alone," she said slowly; "I can't talk to anyone now. I can't even listen. I'd like to stay downstairs until the carriage comes. Won't you let me sit in your drawing-room till it gets here? I've got to try to think — don't you see?"

Mrs. Geikie said no more. "Good-bye," murmured Corrie, and turned away.

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He found her there in the darkened drawing-room, sitting with her hands clasped, and looking down into her lap. She was thinking, her mind fixed weakly on the new beginning and how she should face Mrs. Pinchin — greet the woman, who after all was said, was, none the less, her mother. "Why! I thought you had gone away — gone out!" she murmured perplexedly; and then: "Is the carriage here?"

Phil stood before her, silent and thoughtful, his boyish face dark with the concern he felt. "Won't you go — *please!*" she begged, after a pause, and again there was the queer, crooked smile on her lips; "you know I have said *good-bye* to you."

But instead of going, he still waited, quietly earnest. "There's only one thing I can tell you, Corrie dear," he said slowly. "It does n't make any difference what we've learned — what I heard upstairs, just now. It does n't make any difference, little girl."

She dropped her head inertly. "But you've said that before. Why do you still worry me?"

Her attitude and tone were as if only she had realized the hopelessness of her trouble, but that he might realize, too, were he only to give it a thought.

"Listen, Corrie dear: I don't believe you understand how sincerely I mean that. Can I make it any clearer? Shall I tell you again that I will not let you go — and why?"

"No; it will do no good, Phil. Oh, boy! — boy! — why do you make it so hard for me? Why won't you go, when I have said *good-bye* to you?"

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Isn't it enough? You must not trouble me so. They've told you who I am, and you could see what they thought of it. No, it's as Mrs. Pinchin said — the only thing that's left to me is to go crying back to her to beg her pardon. There's nothing else to do, is there?" She raised her eyes with a quiet certainty in what she said. "But you make it hard — so very hard for me, Phil. I did want to get away without seeing you again, and yet you persist. At the last moment, I wanted to say to your mother and uncle not to tell me — that I didn't want to hear, because I knew. I realized that what I'd dreamed about being happy and having a home — and a name, Phil, was just nothing but a dream. And I didn't want you to hear the ugly awakening. Oh, boy! boy! if I'd only had strength enough to stay away and keep from hearing it — and to keep you from hearing it, too. I wanted it that way. I wanted it, because then, when you remembered me, it would be just as you'd known me first — just as I was before we learned all this dreadful reality."

"Stop, Corrie!" There was a harshness in his remonstrance that echoed almost anger. "Shall I tell you still again that this reality, as you call it, has not changed me? Must I keep on repeating it — or do you really wish me to go away and leave you? Is that it?"

"Oh, Phil! — Phil! can't you see I'm not able to stand much more of this?"

"Very well, then," he answered, in a sudden tone of mastery: "you must n't talk about yourself, Cor-

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rie, in that way. It is n't your name I 'm thinking about, or anything else like that about you ; it 's only you. I want you ! — *you*, Corrie dear — and I won't give you up. Oh, dear, dear little girl ! what difference does it make to us who you are ? You can't go away all alone from me now — sweetheart ! — poor little girl ! ”

She fought for a moment. “ No ! no ! — Phil ! why *do* you ? ” But he would not let her free. Then again came the thought she was losing him, and that this ended everything. “ Oh, boy ! — why do you make it so hard for me ? Can't you see that I must go away from you ? Can't you ? can't you ? Oh, don't you see it ? ” There she clung to him, her face strained against his shoulder, her frame shaking while he tried to comfort her. “ Phil ! boy ! they 're going to make me lose you,” she cried ; “ and I can't — I can't ! ”

“ You 're not going to, dear — there ! there ! ” He held her closer, stroking her hair quietly, till the storm of tears passed and left her calm and restrained again. “ Phil ! ” She reached out her hands and took his face between them. Holding him a moment, with her eyes fastened on his, she drew down his head toward her. “ Phil — this is good-bye ! ”

The carriage was at the door. “ It *is* good-bye,” she whispered, looking up at him steadfastly : “ good-bye, Phil, and please try not to look at me like that ; it *is* the last time, you know. Good-bye ! ”

But he only shook his head, smiling with disbelief. “ Good-bye, dear. It 's only for a little while — till

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I see you again, you know. Good-bye, — till then, little girl!" So while her face lay upturned to his, he kissed her again; and — "good-bye!" she whispered; "it is good-bye!"

Mrs. Pinchin was at home and waiting. She sat in her bedroom, her eyes fastened before her on vacancy, her outstretched hand clinging to the ivory handle of her cane. Mrs. Pinchin was buried in thought, and to judge by the way she clenched her jaws together and scowled, it could not have been a pleasant reflection that raised itself behind that grim mask of hers. A dull, portentous fire burned in her heavy-lidded eyes; she was breathing deeply while she ruminated; and now and then a thick, grunting murmur rumbled in her chest.

Mrs. Pinchin sat alone, it is almost needless to say. Miss Maria was still absent; and on the heels of Corrie's departure, Miss Freedlark had departed also. After a brief interview with her hostess she had gone down the stairs, bag in hand, on her bony face a look of the most convincing and painful astonishment. Perhaps it may be best to let Miss Freedlark so make her exit behind the curtain of her blushes, and say no more about it; her part had been played in the drama; and, if the truth be told, it had been played very little to Mrs. Pinchin's taste. "Oh, thank you for my nice visit," faltered the departing guest, not knowing in her dazed moment just what else to say, whereupon Mrs. Pinchin stared at her with a grin of wonder. "Oh, thank you so much,"

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said Miss Freedlark; and then as a parting evidence of her esteem: "it's nice to think I shall see you Sunday evening."

"Humph! — oh, suit yourself!" growled Mrs. Pinchin, ambiguously; and with a surly grin, sharply closed her door.

So now she sat dunned in her bedchamber, *waiting*. The hours passed and still she brooded; then came the expected one and she raised her crest.

As the door opened, her heavy eyes turned to it, and a silence followed. Then afterward: — "So you have come back," said Mrs. Pinchin, the words uttered with a slow rumbling like thunder answering to the light darting from her eyes. "You've come back, have you?" she repeated with a grim heaviness. Then there was a pause. "And why have you come back?" she asked.

Corrie closed the door, and leaned against it, with her hand still on the knob. There was no wavering in her eyes, as she fronted the glowering visage turned expectantly toward her; she was white, yet resolutely calm. "Yes, I have come back," she said unintently; "I have come to ask you whether you'll let me stay here now?"

"*Hey?*" Mrs. Pinchin's brooding darkness launched itself away, and there dawned in her eyes a new and startling eloquence of passion — not contempt, or the slow fever of sullenness, or rage and hate, but an armed, alert force of inquiry and wonder, and with that, a little gleam of alarm. "*Hey?*" — and then as a light seemed to break in on her mind's

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shadowing uncertainty, her features gradually composed themselves into a fixed, disparaging leer. "Hoh! ho — ho!" she croaked, jeering it under her breath, and grinning with the pleasing certainty that she was right; "and so you've heard something, hey? They've told you!" she cried, knowing it; "and your young whipper-snapper's turned you adrift? Oh-ho!" she gibed, and with a mighty struggle gained her feet. "So you've learned now? Have they told you, hey?" And there her high-pitched eagerness dropped a note — changed, so that when she spoke again it was with a furtive, calculated slowness, as if, once more, doubt and wonder had gained the upper hand. "Have you been told? — and what was it? Come!" she rumbled, the hollow stridency of her voice echoing through the closed room. "Come! I'd like to know," said Mrs. Pinchin, and stared at her.

It seemed to Corrie as if in that pregnant moment all her past life with Mrs. Pinchin raised itself to stream by in a vivid parade, every detail of it crying a new claim to rouse her to undying bitterness. For this was her own mother — the woman who had borne her; and the knowledge of it added a new shame to the misery she already felt — shame for the mother who could have treated her child like that!

"Well — are you going to tell me?" jeered Mrs. Pinchin, tilting her head on one shoulder.

"No! — for why should I?" answered Corrie, in a tone of weary dullness. "You know what I have been told, of course — and why should I speak of it

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to you? It shames me even to think of it, and to say it. No, I 'll never talk of that with you — never! *never!* All I ask of you is to let me stay here where I belong. This is where I must stay, I see, if you will let me. Perhaps some day I shall be able to reason it all out — or, perhaps some time I may have to ask you to tell me. But now it seems so unbelievable that I can't bring myself to think of it."

Mrs. Pinchin dragged a chair to her, and with her eyes still on Corrie, groped for it clumsily, and then sat down. "Eh? I 'd like to know, now, what you 're driving at?" she piped in a queer, cracked tone.

Corrie weariedly studied the pattern of the carpet, speculating on its tracery and florid coloring, as one in a fever stares at the covering of the sick room walls. "Don't! You must n't try to keep it up any longer," she retorted brokenly; "I 've told you I know, and is n't that enough? I understand all — everything, of course, but what you 've done to me all these years. I suppose, though, it 's only the way women like you must treat their children when they 're like me. I did n't know it before. But I want you to understand that you 'll never be anything except *Mrs. Pinchin* to me. I can't ever think of you — or ever call you — by that other name — *never!*"

A faint color gathered in Mrs. Pinchin's flabby cheeks and spread in a flood to her brow and neck. She glowed with it, and a deep, sobbing gasp sounded, as she sucked in her breath. Then her eyes shifted to the floor, and went cruising away into the far corners, darted aside and came drifting back. Guilt

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wrote itself in every line of her face; her eyes stole back to Corrie, and, once meeting the girl's clear look, they leaped away again, running along the floor's edge like a rat trapped and trying to find some way out.

"Oh!" gasped Mrs. Pinchin, shamefully; and so she knew.

There was a garish, ormolu timepiece clucking on Mrs. Pinchin's mantel; a swaggering, gilt vulgarity, whose pendulum rocked to and fro with a kind of drunken knowingness. Its thick, knocking beat attracted her attention, and Corrie fixed her gaze on the jeweled face until her sight swam, each brilliant winking at her with a separate jeering orb. Sickened by it, she wrenched away her eyes, and let them wander vaguely about Mrs. Pinchin's boudoir. Comfort — and the ostentation of comfort, too, vulgar and ill-classed as it was — comfort showed in every nook, a marked, distinct evidence of the self-indulgent being that reigned there. But with all this overpowering display of it, how much had the greedy genius of it all spared to her? She could not remember even so much as the comfort of a kind word or act — much less, the sharing of one of these other material comforts. Greedy, greedy Mrs. Pinchin — and to think that *she* was her mother! Corrie withdrew her gaze from the room's crowded comforts kept there for Mrs. Pinchin only. She looked at Mrs. Pinchin herself.

"It's understood now, is n't it? I know — and

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you know, Mrs. Pinchin. So I must begin again — and begin where I belong — is n't that it? Well, where are the ruffles and velvet for your plum-colored gown? I have my work and you 'll need this for your party Sunday night."

With her cheeks still flaming, Mrs. Pinchin pointed speechlessly to the work-basket, gagged once in an effort to say something, and then, her stick clattering loosely against the furniture, fled the room as if pursued.

Corrie had come home, indeed!

CHAPTER XVIII

Mrs. Pinchin entertains. — A glimpse of West Side society in one of its curious phases. — The lady from the middling West and her convoluted r's. — Mr. Stanton's whimsical remarks, and Mrs. Pinchin's just resentment. — Mrs. Pinchin's volunteer musicians. — The rebuke, and Mr. Stanton's dismay. — Why Corrie would n't elope. — Phil and his singular uncle.

PROMPTLY at eight o'clock on the Sunday evening following, the drawing-room at Mrs. Pinchin's began again to fill itself with Mrs. Pinchin's guests. They came singly, as a rule, yet in such increasing numbers that one momentarily became more and more convinced the night's entertainment had been planned with a far greater elaboration than the hostess had ever before attempted.

Of this, there was a preliminary confirmation in the awning that reached from the curb to the vestibule; and on climbing the steps, the arrivals were greeted with still further evidence of it in the person of a manservant, who with automatic precision murmured to each newcomer: — "Ladies, first floor front; gentlemen, first floor back." There, on the floor above, other servants were in waiting, a man to remove the men's coats; a maid to assist the ladies. On descending, and when the guests had presented themselves at the drawing-room door, a third attendant disclosed himself: — a lackey, flunkey, castel-

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lan, major-domo, butler, or whatever else you choose to call him, who, like his companions, had been hired for the evening from the caterer's. In justice to this personage, however, it should be said that though he had so far fallen beneath himself as to accept day's wages for a duty like this, he still preserved enough of his self-respect not to look pleasant about it. Such as were familiar with the custom gave him their names, when he announced them with whatever degree of scorn he thought necessary to their station, or, more exactly, to their lack of it. Others — and these were the less knowing who sought to blunder by unannounced — he held up with an imperative hand and an equally imperative scowl. "What nyme?" — and the name being given and then announced, they were suffered to make an uncomfortable entrance.

"Mister *Seenyer Halferendy!*"

Entered Signore Alfuente, the rumpled musician, a slight commotion succeeding at his heels as the next comer tried unannounced to force a way past impervious Albion at the door.

"What nyme?"

"Hey? — Why! — oh, Freedlark."

A single glance having established the probable handle to the name, Albion raised his voice: — "Miss O'Freedlark!"

Entered the lady of the bony face and the highly articulated shoulders, and pushed her way toward the hostess.

Mrs. Pinchin sat in her high, heavily-carved oak

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chair before a bank of palms, which, when the entertainment was over, would be transplanted to their pristine jungle of Columbus Avenue. A stiff and impressive aigret nodded on her crest; and from the pendulous lobe of each of the lady's ears a large solitaire diamond hung, glittering with a fire that very nearly, if not almost, equaled the lambent blaze of her eyes. On her massive person, the plum-colored brocade shone forth with a newness of grandeur that, in itself, was worth all the labor and trouble required of Mrs. Pinchin's companion, who had entirely remodeled and rehabilitated the dress with ruffles and a collar of panne velvet. Indeed, as a single evidence, it was enough to distinguish the occasion as above the ordinary; and one needed only to look at it and then at the jewels, with which Mrs. Pinchin had tricked herself out, to know she had determined to make both herself and her evening memorable. For beside the diamonds in her ears, the thewy fingers of each hand were stiff with rings; bracelets as thick and formidable as handcuffs clasped her powerful wrists; and at her throat shone a diamond brooch notable enough in size to have done duty as a stomacher, or, fitted with a hoop, to have graced the brow of a comic opera singer; — perhaps, at the very least, a duchess.

In view of the trying circumstances that had gone before, any other woman less decisive than Mrs. Pinchin might have postponed her entertaining to a more agreeable moment. Or possibly, if it were really necessary to show so bold a front, a more

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timid person might have essayed it on a less determined scale — a small dinner, say, or a few friends in for the evening — just a little distraction to drive dull care away. Yet even to suggest this now of Mrs. Pinchin seems to advocate an injustice that to-night's brave front should hardly encourage, such was the intrepid figure she made.

For there was the old, familiar hostess; there the eyes' languid sullenness, peering insolently through the heavy lids; the same wistful, well-remembered droop of the mouth; and beneath the pouched and leathery, flabby cheeks, the square, determined firmness of jaw and chin. Mrs. Pinchin, in fact, and so far as the world might read from her face, carried herself as if no happening, however untoward, could occur to impugn her resolute and determined courage. The old Pinchin might die, but it never would surrender; and the girl who peered at her from a forgotten corner of the room saw her now as she was — a grim and undefeated protestant of self, menacing the enemy with a visage frowning with all the hauteur and nobility of a warrior whose back is against the wall. *Voilà! vive la Pinchin!* One scarcely could have failed to admire her, alone there and out in the open fighting quietly, — worn and tired, yet still resolute.

“So good of you to come,” muttered the stalwart figure, in a weary, listless voice. Her eyes raised themselves to the face of each newcomer; yet it was only with an effort that she kept them there. Her old dull aplomb of the hostess was hers, yet, though

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even more awkward and repressed; and her greeting, such as it was in its cut and dried precision, seemed dragged from her with a struggle. At other times, she had added to her hackneyed expression some trite observation about the weather, or, perhaps, a question whether the guest found himself in good health. Now, after the one welcome of the "so good of you to come," her eyes wandered dispiritedly; and the newcomer, left stranded on the shores of civility, either faltered an unanswered commonplace himself, or, confused by her silence, straggled away in bewilderment.

"Er — Mr. Alfuente. So good of you to come." Mrs. Pinchin's dull eyes awoke with a little gleam of remembrance, and instead of releasing the not too tidy musician's hand, she clung to it long enough to get her vague thoughts into order. "Glad I saw you, now," she said slowly; "if you have n't anything for to-morrow morning, come up here and see me. I want to talk about music lessons for that — that girl. Say twelve o'clock about, if that suits you." The Signore, who would have expressed his pleasure, had she given him time, felt himself gently propelled onward by the hand that still held his; and Mrs. Pinchin turned to the next newcomer.

"So good of you — " She stopped as her eyes raised themselves. "Hunh! so you got here, did you? "

Miss Freedlark, her pale, fawning eyes playing a duet of cheerfulness with her grinning teeth, pranced ecstatically; yet before she had a chance to reply,

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the hostess had turned indifferently to greet the next in turn.

Corrie detached her shadowy eyes from the scene before her, and looked down at her hands, clasped together in her lap. She sat alone to-night, for the gray, mouse-like figure of Miss Maria still absented itself from Mrs. Pinchin's. When Miss Maria would return was still a question. Corrie had heard only she had gone to the country on a visit, but beyond this, Mrs. Pinchin had not seen fit to enlighten her. Nor had Corrie asked any more, for between her and this woman who had been found to be her mother, there had fallen a barrier of silence. For three days now, she and Corrie had met only at meals, or, very occasionally, in the halls, the stalwart figure clumping by in uneasy, shifty-eyed haste, her face averted; the girl shrinking against the wall to give her a clear passage. It was, indeed, a sort of armed truce, in which each of the contending forces dared make no overt move, but stood waiting at arms for a renewal of the hostilities. At the table, the moody figure presiding over it buried her eyes in her plate; and when the brooding silence was broken, it was only to address a word to the servant, never to speak to the girl who sat there, mute and downcast at her left. To-night, rising from another of these dogged, grisly feasts of silence, Mrs. Pinchin had turned, and, with her hand resting heavily on the table's head, had spoken. "You 'll be there — in the drawing-room, won't you, when the guests come?" There was no command voiced, or indeed meant, in what she

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said. It was, instead, a tacit admission of uncertainty, a confession of weakness as plainly spoken, as if framed in so many words. "Yes, if you require it," the girl answered negligently. "That's a part of my duty, is n't it?" But Mrs. Pinchin, without replying, had scuttled away like a crab.

So Corrie was here now, dowdily attired as of yore, with her hair snaked back into a knot like a house-maid's done up for the morning.

Again the room had filled to the walls; each picture held its close and anxious critic; the usual manœuvering resumed itself to inspect Mrs. Pinchin's numerous articles of *vertu*. There, too, one saw the night's selection of castaways and hermits marooned in their chairs, or celled discreetly in the corners. "So good of you to come, now," protested Mrs. Pinchin, greeting the last of the guests; and across the room, Corrie could hear the thick, tired voice still making its effort. The woman profusely shaking the hostess's hand had lately moved into the neighborhood, she and her husband new colonists from what one may call — not the middle West, but the middling West, — the homes of whose newly rich add so much to the stately, studied architecture of Riverside Drive. She came to-night fully convinced she was making handsome strides in a social campaign aimed upon the smart set, and now apologizing anxiously for arriving so late, was twisting each and every one of her *r's* into a doughnut, while the hostess leered at her curiously. They'd had to wait on the carriage. Her husband would n't *leave* her

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walk. Then when the hack came, they 'd no sooner got in, when her husband *wanted out*. He 'd forgotten his keys which they 'd need if they *wanted in* before the servants got up in the *mawrning*. Mrs. Pinchin was still leering at her, when Albion at the doorway again raised his lungs:

“ Mr. Stanton ! ”

Corrie's eyes leaped up swiftly from her hands. Mrs. Shadyside, the lady with the convoluted *r*'s, had been gently but firmly edged on into the drawing-room's crush, and was now gasping disjointedly to her husband, like a fat carp cast up on the beach by the tide. Corrie looked, and, as the lean, hawk-like visage of Mr. Stanton disclosed itself, elegantly stroking a whisker with his finger tips, the last tint of color in her face went out and left her pale and wide-eyed.

The cool eyes quizzically took in the floral decorations and the room's crowding guests.

“ Well, madam — and how goes it ? ”

Mr. Stanton dropped leisurely into the chair at Mrs. Pinchin's side, and as leisurely looked around him. There had been no other greeting, nor did Mrs. Pinchin look as if she expected one. Her dull eyes had leaped with a momentary fire as she heard his name announced ; and her jaw settled itself into a more pronounced squareness ; and if one had taken the trouble, at that instant, to study Mrs. Pinchin's face intently, one would have detected in it a rather curious expression. Was it distaste that lurked in Mrs. Pinchin's careful eye, or was it even a more

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substantial feeling? — dislike, say; or shall one be downright about it, and call a spade a spade? That rancorous gleam flitted balefully from her eye, glinting for the instant, like pale lightning in a thunder head; and there was Mrs. Pinchin licking her lips, as if the taste of something was hard to cleanse from her mouth.

“What say?”

Mr. Stanton looked at her idly. “Oh, how goes it? That was all, my dear.” As Mrs. Pinchin made no immediate reply, but continued to peer at him, still wetting her lips as if fevered, Mr. Stanton looked away again. “Quite an evening for the herd, is n’t it?” he observed genially, his eyes resting with a meaning smile first on the guests, and then on the room’s decorations. “And something to eat for them, after they have pranced.” He smiled a little more broadly. “The simple pleasures of the peasantry,” said Mr. Stanton, and rippled with laughter at the thought.

Again the leaping fire in the dull eyes; Mrs. Pinchin bit her lip. Had it been Miss Maria, instead, Miss Maria would have wept. But Mrs. Pinchin, biting her lip, only shook a little, and when she looked back at him, her nostrils had widened ominously. “If you don’t like it, then,” she remarked, with a slow and threatening rancor, “what brings you here so often? Oh — you want to know what I mean? Well, I tell you I’m tired of your sneers. Tired of the way you’ve come here and stuck up your nose for years. Now, if you don’t like it, clear

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out and let me alone. I 'll keep on paying up, but you need n't come here."

Mr. Stanton looked up with a quick start of surprise. "Oh, come now, Judie!" he expostulated.

"I mean it!" she answered, her jaw undershot, and her slumbrous eyes now crackling sparks like a static discharge. "I 've stood it as long as I 'm going to."

He looked into her face sharply, and then threw a swift glance around the room. "What 's wrong with you?" he demanded under his breath; "have you told me all that 's happened? Look here!" He stared at her an instant, a searching look, alert and suspicious. "What really went on the other night, Judie? Are you holding anything back from me?"

"I 've told you all there is to tell. It 's settled and I 'm not going to talk of it any more. But you mind what I say." She scowled at him full in the face as she said it. "You 'll be civil when you come here — or you won't come at all."

Mr. Stanton leaned back, and again began plucking at his silky whiskers. "Phew, Judie!" he remarked, after a thoughtful pause; "but you 're a queer piece."

Mrs. Pinchin made no answer. She sat looking straight ahead of her; and for the moment, her guests, and her own required duties as a hostess, seemed more than ever to be forgotten. At length, however, she drew a deep breath, moved uneasily, and looked up. Her eye dully swept the assemblage sitting there, and then awakened, Mrs. Pinchin looked

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about her nervously, frowning in disquiet. "Humh!" Lurching to her feet, she stared past Mr. Stanton to the corner of the room, and there her eye fell on Corrie.

The girl sat with her fingers still clasped together, and her gaze fastened on the man by Mrs. Pinchin's side. One would have had difficulty to read what lay behind her tense expression; but as Mrs. Pinchin lumbered to her feet she detached her eyes from the man and turned them on the woman. Then one might have detected a little shudder starting through her slender frame, a quiver that passed, leaving a deepened pallor on her face. For in that moment the full realization came to Corrie, and she knew, sensing with an utter submission to despair, the mystery of her plight.

Mrs. Pinchin, unaided except by her stick, heaved her way across the room. She was breathing harshly when she arrived. "Play us a little something, won't you?" she asked, and there was that same uncertainty and downright uneasiness in her tone now that had marked her recent speech to the girl. Corrie arose, and made her way to the piano, heavy and unresponsive; Mrs. Pinchin stood listening to a guest, who tried to engage her in conversation, and who, it seemed, was destined to make but poor work of it; and in his chair beside Mrs. Pinchin's abandoned seat, Mr. Stanton, the elegant, sat and nibbled thoughtfully at his fingers.

Shall it be told that Corrie played — and that Corrie knew what she was playing? Shall it be said

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she forgot all else in the harmony's soothing balm? It is true, to be sure, that she sat at the piano, and that her fingers, trained instinctively to the work, wrenched from the keyboard certain associations and sequences of sound that may have passed among Mrs. Pinchin's uncritical guests as music. But to say that she knew what she played, or that she knew how she played it, were no more true than if one said a somnambulist knows what he is doing when he wanders in a trance. For though the score before her was the score of Lizst's *Rhapsodie Hongroise*; and though the notes the piano gave forth were near enough to the air to pass muster, Corrie's eyes were far away from the printed notes and bars, and in Corrie's heart was anything but song — the rhythmic, throbbing pulse of joy and life that breathes through the Abbe's sensuous *motif*.

For she looked at the man who sat by Mrs. Pinchin's chair nibbling at his finger tips; and the more she pored upon the lean and scornful face, hawklike in its aspect of intellectual greed, the more her heart cried out in rebellion at the jest that life had played on her. Rough on Mrs. Pinchin's random guest, we'll say, but, doubtless, Mr. Stanton himself would only have chuckled lightly, had he known.

The music came to an end in a little burst of polite applause; and, as through a fog, hazily, Corrie saw Mrs. Pinchin bearing down on the piano. At her heels, the rumpled musician followed, twirling his moustaches, his velvety eyes glowing consciously; and as Mr. Alfuente sometimes worked his passage

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— to use the expression — by obliging with a little music, Corrie arose to make way for him.

The Signore, after widening his soulful orbs in another stare meant to be alluring, sat himself at the piano. "Got everything you want?" grunted Mrs. Pinchin, in the same, tired voice. "Here you, girl —" She paused uncomfortably, realizing apparently that her tone was the old surly, commanding one of the time when she frankly domineered. "I mean — will you see Mr. Alfuento has what he wants?"

She went back to her chair after that, ignoring Mr. Stanton, who, by this time, had so far recovered himself as to be able to look around him coolly; and leaning on her stick, sat back with a gentle sigh. "Tired?" asked Mr. Stanton, casually; but as Mrs. Pinchin made no answer, he smiled idly, and then with a less confident scowl, went at his finger-nibbling anew. "Oh, suit yourself!" sneered Mr. Stanton, and said no more.

Corrie, after mutely pointing out the music in the cabinet beside the piano, as silently departed, leaving Mr. Alfuento staring after her with an astonished and rueful frown. However, the guests waited, and more or less consoled by their expectant attention, the musician turned, and directed himself to the piano.

How the girl survived the evening's ordeal, even she could not have told. She sat there in the background, as self-effaced as a Miss Maria, and unaware of what went on about her, except as the changing sights and sounds of Mrs. Pinchin's entertainment

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came to her like vague occurrences of a dream. There was never a lack of volunteers, such as they were, in the lady's drawing-room assemblages; as Mr. Stanton so keenly had observed, the herd pranced and with no small degree of willingness. "Music" said Mrs. Pinchin's cards in the lower corner, and the hostess had never been called to pay for it in cash. To-night there would be what afterward Miss Freedlark would describe fulsomely as a collation; the herd would prance first, and then it would be fed. Mr. Alfuente obliged with a first number, and then two successive encores; on the heels of that, there was polite conversation; and then a lady who had hopes — deluding hopes, however — of selling Mrs. Pinchin a few dozen tickets to a concert she was giving, got up and sang. More conversation, then; and again Mr. Alfuente obliged, following with a double encore, once more. Afterwards, there was a duet by the lady concert-giver and a basso-profundo in a knotted tie stuck into his shirt front; subsequently came the promised supper.

As Mrs. Pinchin arose to give her signal to her guests — to those whom the genial Mr. Stanton had so genially likened to our dumb friends — her eye again wandered toward Corrie. There was less uncertainty in the signal now, for the girl, as Mrs. Pinchin had shrewdly seen, had forced upon herself an obedience to what she considered her line of duty. "Play!" signaled Mrs. Pinchin's lips, as she jerked her head toward the piano; and again Corrie drifted across the room. Her face, as she passed

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the finger-nibbler in his chair, was white and expressionless; but as she went by the perturbed Mr. Stanton, one might have seen her, with an almost imperceptible movement, draw her skirt aside to keep it from touching his outstretched boot.

Mrs. Pinchin turned away from the man, who was now leisurely rising; but Mr. Stanton, as if determined not to be put out by her haughtiness, addressed a smiling observation to his hostess over her haughty shoulder. "May I esquire the Queen of the May?" inquired Mr. Stanton, lightly, "or shall I straggle in with the peasantry?"

They were, in that moment, alone, hedged in on one side by the bank of palms; before them, a little open space left vacant in front of Mrs. Pinchin's throne. At the mocking words, a ruddy color suffused her neck and spread to her leathery cheeks; Mrs. Pinchin turned slowly on her heel, yet by the time she had faced her sneering guest, there had been time for her face to pale shockingly. "I told you I'd not stand that any more," she said quietly, under her breath; "are you contemptuous of this house because it is the only one in New York that has not shut its door in your face? The time's come, I warn you, when you sha' n't sneer at me any more," said Mrs. Pinchin; and looking him again in the face, she stumped away toward the dining room, leaving Mr. Stanton peering after her, scarlet and disconcerted.

Corrie saw the moment's conflict and awoke sufficiently to marvel. The guests, streaming away in Mrs. Pinchin's wake, flocked through the double

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doors; the room was emptied, yet Mr. Stanton remained, still tugging furiously at his whiskers. Hidden behind the sheets of music on the rack, Corrie watched, her hands, by instinct only, carrying on the task of beating out a march to lead Mrs. Pinchin's guests to the promised feast; and as she watched she saw a look of covert wonder and dismay, perhaps fear, oust every other expression from Mr. Stanton's usually scornful features. "If—" he muttered under his breath; and then saying no more, silently thoughtful, Mr. Stanton wandered off at the heels of the guests.

The girl's head sank forward dispiritedly, and the music came to an end. There were no tears in her eyes as she rested her forehead on the arm raised up to the piano's edge; she had not been able yet to find in her arid misery the woman's solace of tears. But why weep when there was nothing to be gained from it? Tears were not a thing to salve a woe like hers. Hour by hour, she might pour out whole torrents of grief, and the flood might rise up around her till she stood in a briny ocean of tears; yet when the tears were shed and there were no more left to weep, there would be still that same implacable shame of woe that neither time, nor tears, nor grief ever could assuage.

"Corrie!"

She heard the whispered name, still leaning forward with her face buried in her arm. For the instant, she believed it only an echo sprung from her disordered thought.

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“Corrie! — Corrie, *dear!*”

“Oh — oh, is it *you!*”

She had started up with the gasping exclamation, a moment's color flooding her cheeks and then fading, until in each cheek, only a small, blazing spot remained. “*Phil! — Phil!*” she whispered; and then forgetting all her resolution, the decision of her poor, frail little will — the resolve that they must never see each other again, Corrie forgot utterly what she had so decided must be, and clung desperately to his hands. “Oh, *Phil — boy, boy!*” she whispered brokenly; “I can't stand it much longer.”

He was quiet for a moment. “There's no reason why you should, dear,” he answered slowly; “that's why I have been waiting here so long.”

“Waiting so long? I don't think I understand.” She raised her tired face to look at him dully.

“Did n't you see me when I came in? I've been here more than an hour — upstairs, waiting. Corrie, why would n't you see me this morning — and yesterday — and the day before? You would n't even answer my letters.”

“No — I know.” She sat back from him, listless and dreary again. “You must n't worry me, Phil. I've said I could n't stand it much longer; to see you makes it all the harder. Won't you go away and not trouble me so? To live here and to have always to face what I know is bad enough, but, Phil — go away, Phil — and please, please don't come back again. I won't be able to stand it if you don't let me forget.”

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He waited until she had grown calm again. "I don't want you to forget, dear, if it means forgetting me. And I can't stay away, as you ask." He looked down at her, smiling gently. "Corrie, I *can't*; and that's the plain truth of it. Dear, listen to me. Come away from this place. Come away with me, to-night. Will you, dear? Oh, Corrie, I can't leave you here!"

She shrank back further, frightened and trembling. He tried to take her hand and she drew it away.

"Will you go with me and be married?" he asked again; but Corrie had begun shaking her head wildly as soon as his lips formed the words.

"No — no, Phil!"

"You must, Corrie; why won't you?" and then the inevitable complaint of hot-headed youth and love — "Don't you care for me enough?"

"And face your mother when I've dragged you down to me?" she questioned, forcing out the words: "No, Phil; not that, either for your sake or mine. Haven't I said I love you too much for that? For the sake of both of us, I can't do it. Don't ask me to tell you so again — ever — ever, Phil. Because if you — Why, what is it?"

She broke off, looking up at him wonderingly, perhaps a little frightened, for so far from looking at her, he had raised his head to stare across the room to the corner where heavy draperies hung over a door. Through the curtains a face peered idly for a moment, and then a man stepped forward into the room.

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It was Mr. Stanton, and he did not see the two at the piano, — or, if he did, he did not realize.

“ Phil! *What is it?* ”

Then she saw, and with a shrill breath, sat back and watched.

A palm at the piano’s side hid the boy as he stood upright; the man thoughtfully pacing the room’s other end could not see him. In the boy’s face was wonder, startled and bewildering; then his hands clenched themselves together at his side with a start of understanding. Waiting a moment, he walked swiftly and noiselessly across the floor; and at that moment Mr. Stanton had turned, still thoughtfully, to stare at the wall before him. Something troubled Mrs. Pinchin’s usually cool and confident friend, as one might have seen from the scowl in his eyes and the ruffling of his brows. Doubtless, Mr. Stanton had excellent reasons for feeling troubled. For years he had dominated Mrs. Pinchin’s home as if he were the genius of the place, and as if all within it should cringe at a snap of his elegant fingers. Now his reign seemed tottering — and why? The young man going toward him, reached out a hand and gripped Mr. Stanton by the shoulder.

“ Let’s have a look at you,” said Phil Geikie, whirling around his astonished captive till they were face to face. “ So it’s Mr. Stanwood Geikie, is it? — my dear Uncle Stanwood! ”

In that sudden juncture of alarm and rage, the hawklike face lost its usual habit of scornful aplomb, and convulsed itself into an ugly scowl. “ Hands

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off, you young cub!" snarled Mr. Stanton; or, more properly speaking, Mr. Stanwood Geikie. For it was he, indeed, — Mr. Stanwood Geikie, — who had so long paraded under the *alias* of Mr. Stanton. "Hands off, I say!"

His nephew, having satisfied himself as to Mr. Stanton's real identity — this Mr. Stanton whom he had for days suspected in Corrie's chance references to him — having satisfied himself of this, Phil flung him loose with a gesture that drove Uncle Stanwood floundering against the wall. "You young whelp!" the man growled, and Phil laughed at him mirthlessly, with a scorn that sent the blood mounting into the hawklike face. "You young whelp! I'll make you pay for this!" he cried between his teeth, savagely. Corrie looked on helplessly.

For until to-night, the girl had never so much as dreamed the real significance of Mr. Stanton's presence in that curious household. At times, of course, she indeed suspected he had some connection with the mystery — there were, for example, those instances when Mr. Stanton had shown his interest in Mrs. Pinchin's affairs: The morning hour when she had caught Mr. Stanton fumbling at the door of Mrs. Pinchin's private room, and when afterwards, he and Miss Maria had provided their curious encounter on the stairs; there was the equally meaning occasion, too, when Mr. Stanton, having seen the advertisement, had come running to Mrs. Pinchin's home; and, to top it all off with another singular event, one recalls the moment when the man, brushing

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by Miss Freedlark—Miss *Fishhawk*, as he had called her then — had forced his way into Mrs. Pinchin's early hour privacy. But dulled and bemused by all the other happenings that had crowded in on her, Corrie had failed to grasp his real identity; so Mr. Stanton, announced suddenly at the drawing-room door, had as suddenly revealed himself to Corrie in his true relation both to her and Mrs. Pinchin. For, in so many words, Mr. Stanton was her father.

But Phil had known — or, rather, he had guessed. "So it 's my dear Uncle Stanwood, is it," he laughed scornfully, "who 's been setting his friend, Mrs. Pinchin, on my trail? And what do they hope to gain by their cleverness? I 'll wager it 's something clever, anyway. Speak up, Uncle Stan; what is the swindle?" He stepped nearer as he spoke, and the contemptuous laugh went out of his face, and left him white, with his jaw squared determinedly. "Answer me! What is your scoundrelly game?" he gritted out, his eyes going threateningly to Uncle Stanwood's tall collar, as if at the next move he meant to pin him to the wall by the throat.

But Uncle Stanwood was not one who lacked courage — physical courage, at all events. He remained where he was without moving, and a faint, mocking smile curled his lip, a grin insolent and cool. It were as if Uncle Stanwood found himself at his best and was enjoying it. "No, — you won't dare answer," said Phil again, scornfully, and turned away from him.

Then the man leaning against the wall said

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something beneath his breath, and what happened afterward was very swift. But quick as the swinging forward of one form against the other, Corrie was almost as quick. She was able, at all events, to stay what else might have happened in Mrs. Pinchin's drawing-room had she not been there to prevent it.

"No — no, no! It's abominable, and you can't! Can't! Can't!" she cried, fiercely sobbing it. "Don't you realize who he is? I tell you, you shall not! Let him go!"

The boy, white and shaking, flung the man away from him again. "Did you hear what he said? The dog!" he growled. "It was about my father."

Corrie pushed him aside. "You must go — go home, Mr. Stanton," she whispered, panting with terror and excitement. "Get your hat and coat, please, and go quickly. The others will be coming in here. They must not see you."

Mr. Stanton — or Stanwood Geikie, if you choose — gave his nephew another mocking sneer and went. The hangings dropped behind him, and then Corrie turned to the boy.

"Phil — oh, my heart's just breaking!" she wailed, and buried her face in her arm, when for the first time, now, the tears came streaming, abjectly and with no courage left to restrain them.

"Will you go with me — to-night?" he asked. There was no answer. "Will you go?" he asked again, and stood waiting until there should be a lull in her storm of woe. Still she made no reply; and

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out in the hall footfalls sounded on the stairs; the door slammed as Mr. Stanton departed for the night. Then Corrie raised her face.

“Give me a little time to think, Phil. I can’t drag you down like this, when you have everything before you. Let me try to reason it out. I know it’s wrong — wicked of me; but I’d like to think of it a little while. Just to think of it, Phil, if nothing else. Go now, won’t you?”

“And shall I come back?”

“Yes, but please, please go!”

Out in the dining room, the feast had progressed as far as the salad. Two of the menservants, passing around among the guests at the half-dozen small tables, offered it on large platters; and at their heels came a third, pouring wine.

Mrs. Pinchin sat enthroned at a table in the bay window, darkly surveying the feast. Three others sat with her; the new millionaire and his wife from Riverside Drive, and Mr. Alfuente, who had been beckoned, greatly to his own astonishment, to take the seat when the hostess had seen Mr. Stanton bearing down upon it. And now that Mr. Stanton had departed peevishly, Mrs. Pinchin found herself able to give full attention to her banquet; so she sat there on the alert.

“Out home,” said the lady from the middling West, “we always put green peas in our chicken salad.”

Mrs. Pinchin gave no heed. Her eye was on the

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waiter with the champagne; and when he drew nearer, she beckoned to him energetically.

“Yes, madam.”

Mrs. Pinchin twitted him by the sleeve till his ear was on a level with her mouth. “Don’t give those others more than one round of the champagne. If they ask for it, fill them up on the burgundy. Champagne for us here, though, as long as we want it — at this table, you understand.”

“Yes, madam.”

Mrs. Pinchin turned to the lady at her side. “Excuse me; I was thinking about sending in a plate of food for my paid companion. What was it you were saying?”

CHAPTER XIX

Early morning in Seventy-fifth Street, and the return of Miss Maria. — Her piteous appeal to Corrie. — The dead child. — Mrs. Pinchin returns to her old self. — Corrie visits her aunt. — The shape sitting in the gloom. — Mrs. Pinchin decides to explain. — The stolen papers and the scene in the private room. — Mrs. Pinchin has her promised stroke at last.

MONDAY — a bright April morning — and the day after Mrs. Pinchin's notable Sunday evening. In West Seventy-fifth Street, the first housemaids after the dawn had just begun their early matinal labors of sweeping off the stoops, when a gray, patient, weary figure alighted from a Columbus Avenue car, and came toiling along the sidewalk. In the slight form, stoop-shouldered, frail, and dowdily attired, one detected something known and familiar; and though the features were obscured by a thick draping of *voile*, there was a hint from behind the fabric of gold-framed spectacles, of uneasy, tired eyes. They were red-rimmed eyes, too — forlorn and pitiable; for this was Miss Maria, who had come home at last.

Early as the hour was, Corrie had already risen. Sleep had not restored her to the usual freshness and spirit that youth enjoys after a night's repose; for, if the truth be told, Corrie had neither reposed nor slept, but through the greater part of the night had

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sat up in bed in the dark, her chin in her hand, and her mind battling with thoughts from which there was to be no escape even in slumber. Now, wan and slow, she came down the stairs in Mrs. Pinchin's at that exact and precise moment when the other figure, also slow and wan, dragged herself up the stairs outside.

Mounting like one that treads a ladder to the gallows, Miss Maria blindly fumbled for the bell; and then, after she had rung, what little strength she possessed seemed to leave her. Pushing back her veil, she leaned against the wall of the vestibule, and gagged with a sob that racked her from head to foot. Poor thing! Poor, dejected creature! For though hers was a nature always ready at the first cloud of trouble to turn on the waterworks, her grief now appeared to be of a profundity too great to remedy itself in the usual solace of tears. So there she was, leaning against the wall, her face filled with woe and her slight figure bent over like one that bears a too heavy burden up the hill.

“Why, — Miss Maria !”

The gray figure turned dumbly and swayed into the hall. She looked at Corrie dully, in her eyes that fixity of expression one notes in the staring orbs of a sleepwalker. “My — Is Judie — Mrs. Pinchin — is she down yet?” Before Corrie could answer, Miss Maria gave a little shake of remembrance. “Oh, no — of course. I must go to her. I must go to her.”

She thrust back her veil a little further, and turned

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her dry, hazy eyes on the staircase, as if measuring her weakness against the strength it would require to drag herself to the floor above. Then she made the effort, and halfway down the hall swayed, and but for her outstretched hand supporting herself against the wall, Miss Maria might have fallen.

"Oh!—let me help you. Are you ill?" cried Corrie, alarmed.

Miss Maria smiled miserably. "I can't do it. I can't walk up those stairs. Why, I have n't strength enough."

She swayed again, and Corrie put an arm around her. "You must sit down. Here, lean on me. There's a chair over there. Oh! she's going to faint!" cried Corrie.

But Miss Maria, once she had reached the chair, recovered herself. "You must help me—I've got to see her—up the stairs," she mumbled brokenly. "I don't think I can do it alone."

"Poor, poor lady!—you can't! You must sit here till you're stronger. Oh, Miss Maria! what has happened to you?"

Maggie, the waitress, in morning disarray, looked out from the pantry, staring when she saw the picture in the hall. "Maggie!" Corrie called to her excitedly, "go tell Mrs. Pinchin. Rap on her door till you rouse her. Poor, poor lady!" murmured Corrie, trying to undo Miss Maria's wraps, as the limp form shrank down in the chair. "There! Now let me get off your hat, too."

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Then Miss Maria, gagging again, shook out a sob that seemed at last to break open the springs of grief; and with the hot tears pouring down her face, she clutched at Corrie's hands. "Oh, be kind — kind to me! — just a little kind!" she wailed, and clung to the girl. "But you are kind, are n't you? — and I think it breaks my heart, too. Oh, Corrie! I have n't always been wicked and cruel. I did n't mean to be. No — no, no!" wept Miss Maria, in a choking voice. "I 've been a little good — a little kind, too, have n't I, Corrie? Tell me I have n't always been cruel and wicked, because I — I did n't mean to be! — not always."

"What is *this*?" gurgled a thick, freezing voice. "Maria!"

In the emotion of that strained moment neither had heard Mrs. Pinchin stumping down the stairs. She stood now above them, a hand on the balusters, the other gripping her cane; and her face was white and angry. Whether she had heard Miss Maria's hysterical plea, and whether it alone was to explain her wrath and alarm, was a matter Corrie could not know. But it was still a fact — and a singular one, into the bargain — that Miss Maria, at the first word, crouched down in her seat silenced, and then, as if recalling what had brought her home, she got to her feet, and with her hands outstretched, plunged toward the thunder-faced woman on the stairs.

"Oh, Judie — Judie! It 's all, all over! My baby 's gone. She died at midnight. Be good to me

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— a little kind. I had to come to you! Oh, Judie, Judie! — because my heart is broken."

The wrath died instantly out of Mrs. Pinchin's face; she appeared to understand. "Gone?" she cried in an undertone. "Oh-h!" said Mrs. Pinchin, in a rumbling voice that was almost, if not quite, a groan. "GONE!" she repeated, and with that still echoing hollowly in her throat, Mrs. Pinchin hobbled down the few remaining stairs; and with the first show of tenderness and compassion Corrie had ever known her to reveal, she reached out her arms and drew the wailing, clinging Miss Maria to her breast. "My poor, poor girl!" uttered Mrs. Pinchin; and then a single tear gemmed her puffy eyelid, and like at least one drop of the gentle rain of heaven, fell in its quality of mercy, twice-blessed, on the head buried in her arms. "There! there! — Hush!" soothed Mrs. Pinchin. "Come, now; I'll take you up to your room," she said; and putting a stalwart arm around the other's shoulders, she waved Corrie away with a fierce toss of her head; and turned slowly to the stairs. Step by step upward, her hand gripping the rail, Mrs. Pinchin climbed, lurching powerfully at every tread, and with each lurch, dragging Miss Maria with her. "Poor, poor girl!" croaked Mrs. Pinchin; and then the two passed from sight around the bend of the stair.

But as Corrie turned away, she heard one last wail break sobbingly from Miss Maria's lips. "Oh, Judie — *dear* Judie! Now say you'll give it up! Say you're willing now!"

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“Hush!” answered Mrs. Pinchin, in her mannish voice.

That Monday morning Corrie breakfasted alone. Not that she ate or was able to eat; for after chipping the morning’s egg, she sat back and stared at it reflectively. Upstairs, in her room, Miss Maria had been put to bed; and Mrs. Pinchin, sitting beside the sufferer, had ordered a tray sent up for herself. On the tray were fruit, oatmeal, a bit of — But never mind. Two hours passed, and then Mrs. Pinchin emerged, bearing the tray in her hands.

“Order my carriage at once,” she said, and in the command there remained none of the placating uncertainty that had accented her speech during these last trying days. Instead, there was the old force, the familiar, masterful decisiveness; in that brief though vital moment, Mrs. Pinchin fully appeared to have come into her own again. “Take this,” she ordered, and thrust the tray into Corrie’s hands. “And telephone at once to the stable. I’m in a hurry.”

“Shall I stay with Miss Maria while you’re out?” asked Corrie, patiently.

“No,” grunted Mrs. Pinchin, crisply. “No; keep out of here,” she growled; and then with a stare, she retreated backwards into the darkened room, and closed the door with a slam.

Corrie, after telephoning, strayed into the drawing-room, where she looked from the front windows a while. Afterwards, she wandered thoughtfully into a

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dim corner, where she sat down and frowned. In addition, she bit her lip nervously, and presently, she got up and paced the floor, her head lowered in cogitation. "Shall I?" she murmured to herself, and a half hour passed. Then Mrs. Pinchin's brougham arrived at the door and Corrie looked up with a nod. "Yes, I will!" said Corrie, pressing her lips together firmly; and pushing aside the draperies at the door, she walked out into the hall.

Mrs. Pinchin, attired in a black turban, a black wrap, black gloves, and a sable veil, was coming down the stairs. She looked at Corrie roughly, grunted, and pushed on toward the door.

"May I do anything for Miss Maria?" asked the girl, quietly.

"No!" grunted Mrs. Pinchin, stalking on.

"Do you think she'd like some broth?" inquired Corrie, hopefully.

"No!" growled Mrs. Pinchin. "No! stop bothering me," she rumbled. "I tell you, no!"

"Oh!" murmured Corrie; and then the street door banged, as Mrs. Pinchin, all in black, blackly went on her way.

"Well," murmured Corrie, reflectively. Biting her lip again, she slowly climbed the staircase. "I will!" she said with determination, going up; and ten minutes later, when she appeared in hat and jacket, "I will! — I just will!" said Corrie, coming down. "I'll hear what she says, anyway."

If Corrie, at the precise moment she came down the steps of Mrs. Pinchin's, had thought to look

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toward the distant avenue, her eye, perchance, might have descried a well-known figure now hurrying along the sidewalk. It was a man's figure, and one needed only a single glance at the hawklike features and the iron-gray whiskers of a past fashion, to identify the person as Mrs. Pinchin's familiar guest. Once more, too, Uncle Stanwood, *alias* Mr. Stanton, walked as if he were in an un-Chesterfieldian hurry, such was the speed with which he darted along close to the area railings. But the very instant the spry, cool eyes clapped themselves on the girl coming down the steps of the house for which he himself was aiming, the gentleman halted abruptly; and for the briefest fraction of time, it looked as if he even contemplated flight.

But after all, there was no real cause, unless it were the movings of his own conscience, to provoke Uncle Stanwood into a panic. Corrie, with her eyes lowered thoughtfully, slowly descended the steps; a few minutes later, apparently to his very great relief, she turned the corner on her way to the Seventy-second Street station of the L road. Then the gentleman bustled along again, leaving Corrie quite ignorant of this amusing little by-play.

But at this juncture, the troubled girl was in no mood to have enjoyed either Uncle Stanwood's caprices or any other evidence of his spry and singular nature. A Sixth Avenue train was just drawing up to the platform as she arrived there; and again irresolution marked itself in her face. "Shall I, or shall I not?" It appeared to be a remarkably por-

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tentous question at the minute; and hesitating whether she should board the train or not, she was struggling back from the crowd rushing for the cars, when the gentlemanly guard helped her to make up her mind. "Both gates, there! Step lively now!" roared the polite functionary, furiously rattling the ironwork; "'s a Bat'ry 'rain," or words to that effect; and so Corrie drifted aboard, urged irresolutely by his exhortation.

The frown of disquiet, however, remained on her face as she rode southward. At Fifty-ninth Street it had grown deep; at Fifty-third Street, where the train swung eastward to Sixth Avenue, it had grown deeper. At Fiftieth Street, where the guard put in a scowling face to announce the station, Corrie scowled back at him frankly. At Forty-second Street, the cloud had spread over the entire horizon of her thought; but after passing Thirty-third Street, there appeared a rift in the sky, just a little glimpse of sunshine, gleaming weakly through the vapors. Then came the successive stages—Twenty-eighth Street, Twenty-third, and Eighteenth Street; at Eighteenth Street, the heavens began to clear. "Fourteenth Street!" bawled the guard, and Corrie looked up nodding to herself. Arising, she walked down the car aisle at the heels of the mob struggling to get off, and took a seat near the door. At Eighth Street—"Wythth Street!" sneered the guard—she alighted, walked down to the street, and having edged over far enough to see the clock on Jef-

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ferson Market tower, she looked up, studying its face.

"A quarter of," she murmured to herself.
"Well, anyway, she's my aunt!"

Having uttered this cryptic remark, she turned, and with her face set in decision, crossed Greenwich Avenue, and hurried along the crooked *détour* of Tenth Street.

For Corrie's mission was an adventurous one. Since the hour when Mr. Biggamore had repeated his interview with Miss Tollabee, and at the same time had revealed not only the fact that Miss Tollabee was Corrie's aunt, but that Mrs. Pinchin was Corrie's mother, the girl had been trying to make up her mind to call on her new-found relative. But why? — someone will ask. Why? Well, deep down in Corrie's mind was a thought that she might throw herself on her aunt's mercy, and beg for shelter under a roof, which, after all is said, was, at the least, respectable. There, in time, perhaps, she might hope to — But no matter now what Corrie hoped; it will be enough to say that the hope, shadowy as it was, and guileless in its innocence, had something to do with the warm-hearted, impulsive boy, who was already willing to chance his future for the sake of her and for her own sake. So armed by her decision, Corrie plunged down into Tenth Street, and almost instantly looked around her with astonishment.

For somehow the detached thoroughfare appealed, in her familiar study of streets and the houses therein, as a by-way she had known. Had she ever

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traveled it before in her quest of the house with the white pillars, the green blinds, and the fan light over the door? She thought not, after a moment's reflection. No, in her other visits to the quarter, she had passed by along Greenwich Avenue to the streets beyond. But house by house, as she looked up into the doorways for the number of Miss Tollabee's home, the thoroughfare grew more and more vaguely familiar, as if it answered in its details to some graphic visual image indelibly photographed in mind, perhaps as the background to some unusual event. There before her now, was a square, plain-faced domicile of brick, its door graced by a large and shining knocker; and in front of it was a little garden no larger than a tea tray, blooming raggedly with a few old-fashioned flowers that so far, had escaped the forays of the neighborhood's urchin freebooters. Now where? — where? —

Then again, like a blaze of light, remembrance flashed through her mind, and she knew! Yes! she'd seen the house before! That day Miss Maria had brought her away from Mrs. Pinchin's to play with a crippled child! Corrie knew now, indeed! This was the house, and that child must have been the Tollabee child. But *why* had Miss Maria brought her here? And *what* had Miss Maria to do with it? Corrie looked up sharply at the silent windows; they were closed and their shades were tightly drawn — all but the window of that one room where the stricken child had sat, — drooling, blind-eyed in its vacuity of mind. *That* window was now raised a nar-

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row six inches or so, and its lowered curtain flapped slowly back and forth. "Oh," said Corrie, desperately; "I think I'm going out of my head."

Marching straight up the steps to the door, she laid hold of the bell hanger and rang.

In the house's quiet depths footfalls sounded, a heavy tread that marked time to a *thump, thump, thump*, as if someone knocked in answer to the peal of the bell. The noise kept on, growing more distinct, and then she heard other footfalls moving briskly on the basement stairs; they paused and it seemed to Corrie that she heard a voice murmur out an order to the approaching servant. Afterwards a door closed in the nearby passage; the knob rattled, as a hand sprang the catch, and Corrie drew in her breath.

"If you please," she said nervously, "I would like to see Miss Margaret Tollabee."

It was a servant that opened. She looked uncertainly at the visitor, and when she answered, it was in that hushed voice which servants affect when there is grave illness or a death in the house.

"She's not here, ma'am," said the maid, speaking from behind the half-opened door, and still clinging to the knob.

"Not in? When will Miss Tollabee be at home?"

Without answering, the servant drew in her head, and conversed in even more lowered tones, apparently with someone standing behind her.

"Just a moment, ma'am," said the servant; and with no further apology or explanation, calmly closed

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the door in Corrie's face. Then through the glass dimly, she saw a form flit across the hall; and just as she had made up her mind that Miss Margaret Tollabee stood inside and that she had reasons for not wishing to meet her sister's offspring, the door was slowly opened, and the servant appeared again.

"Please to come in, ma'am," she said, and made way for Corrie to pass.

The little parlor into which she was shown by the maid was dark, uncommonly dark. In the further corner near the window, a ray of light streamed through a chink between the drawn shade and the woodwork; and though this small illumination failed to light up more than a square yard or so of carpet, it was strong enough to guide her to a chair. Going straight to it, Corrie made no effort to pierce the gloom at the room's further end; and dropping into the seat, she bent her head in thought. For now that she had arrived, what was she to say to her aunt? Should she throw herself on Miss Tollabee's mercy, saying who she was and begging her protection, or should she first make sure of her aunt's feelings toward her? After all, Miss Tollabee might not feel inclined to view the matter charitably; and furthermore, there was no direct certainty that Mrs. Pinchin was really the missing sister. It was a fact, of course, that Corrie was sure of it, yet she was still clear-headed enough to reason that Stanwood Geikie's presence at Mrs. Pinchin's might be accounted for in other ways — the possibility that Mrs. Pinchin was only another of his dupes — an-

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other of his victims. "No," said Corrie, musing aloud, "nothing is certain!" and just then came to her the creeping knowledge she was not alone in that room, but that someone sat in the gloom, fixedly staring at her.

The parlor was long and narrow, its further end lost in darkness. Down the middle a long table stretched; and as Corrie's eyes strained through the gloom, she saw vaguely at the table's other end, a heavier bulk of shadow, immobile and large. There her straining eyes swam with the effort; she looked again, and her sight arranged to the room's obscurity, gradually separated that deeper shape of darkness from the deep shadows at the background.

Someone *was* standing there, a hand resting on the table's edge, and across the sombrous space between, a ghostly face stared fixedly at hers.

"Oh!" exclaimed Corrie; "Miss Tollabee!" — and then, as the figure lurched forward: "Mrs. Pinchin!"

For it was she, indeed. With a hop, a skip, and a jump, she lumbered across the room and gripped the girl by the wrist. "So you 've tracked me here at last, have you?" she hissed beneath her breath. "So you 've snooped, and followed, and spied regardless, here to this house of death? *Girl!*" she rumbled with a kind of savage exultance of her fury; "will nothing ever please you? Now, what in God's name *is it* you want to know?" she cried, forgetting all else in her blazing exasperation. "What do you wish to know?"

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She reached out her hand and snatched at the shade, flooding the room with light, so that she might peer into Corrie's face. "What else, I say? — Come! Out with it, won't you? — for I'd like to know what that prying old woman fool of a man has set you up to now! You know who I mean? Now, tell me what it is!"

Corrie knew well enough that she meant Mr. Biggamore; she fastened her eyes on Mrs. Pinchin's.

"I wish to know nothing from you," she answered, making no effort to free herself from Mrs. Pinchin's grip. "It was enough when I learned you were my mother."

"Hunh!" Mrs. Pinchin expressed no surprise; her grunt was halfway between a sneer and a snarl. "Well, is n't that enough to satisfy you? Is n't that enough?"

Corrie smiled at her wanly. "Yes, that's quite enough. I don't care to learn any more."

"Then what did you come here for?"

Corrie raised her eyes to the face pressed close to hers, and answered: "I came here to see my aunt, Margaret Tollabee. I came to ask her to help me. I know she's wished for years, Mrs. Pinchin, to get her sister back to her; and until I found you here, I didn't think you had heart enough to answer your sister's prayer. Mrs. Pinchin, I came to ask her whether she'd take me, if you would n't go back to her. I wanted her to give me a decent home. And so now you know, Mrs. Pinchin."

On Mrs. Pinchin's face there grew a look, first of

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gaping stupefaction; then, as the girl went on, of a growing, derisive, unaccountable jocundity, hearty in its merry and amazed contempt. A shout of laughter,— that was as suddenly stilled, however,— burst unexpectedly from her lips; and she rocked back her head, and gazed at Corrie with her jaws working frantically together. “Oho!” tittered Mrs. Pinchin, in a thick, throaty giggle, “so you wanted *her* to take care of you? Ho! ho!— and well, miss!” she cried, suddenly beginning to lick her lips, “since it’s a home you wish— oh, I think I’ll die of it— well, we’ll go right to our home on the instant! Come!” she ordered, and there all her impious laughter fled out, and left her face screwed up into an ugly frown. “Come along now!” she said, and tightened her grip on Corrie’s wrist. “Ask her for a home!— and oh, to think a daughter of mine should be such a fool!”

“Wait!” said Corrie. “Before we go, let me say this to you, Mrs. Pinchin.” She looked her full in the eyes. “I shall not ask my aunt to take me, because I’m afraid now you may be with her too. I shall not stay with you anywhere, Mrs. Pinchin, and now I shall tell you why.” She stooped, drew in her breath, and then said it between her teeth. “Because though you *are* my mother, Mrs. Pinchin, I think you a wicked and shameless creature,— without heart!— or soul!— or pity! There, that’s why, Mrs. Pinchin!”

“Silence!” roared Mrs. Pinchin, and dragged her through the doorway.

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They went out into the street, Mrs. Pinchin still clinging to Corrie's wrist. "You need not hold me, Mrs. Pinchin," said Corrie, quietly; "I will go with you." Her captor released her then, and went thumping along in silence. They crossed Greenwich Avenue, rounded the edge of Jefferson Market, and there Mrs. Pinchin set her course for Ninth Street. Hobbling over the crossing, she raised her stick, and began furiously signaling to a carriage that stood halfway down the block. Presently, the drowsy coachman saw the figure beckoning so at the street end, and picked up his lines; and as the equipage drew near, Corrie recognized it and the lame and halt roans with their jingling pole chains.

"Home!" growled Mrs. Pinchin, and thrust Corrie inside. She got in ponderously, wheezing and grunting, and slammed the door behind her. Then, when the brougham had turned into Fifth Avenue, Corrie looked up from her hands to pore a moment on the scowling profile, dark and unlovely with its thick-lipped, heavy-lidded symbolism of greed and self-indulgence. "Mrs. Pinchin," she said, still quietly; "Tell me — are you really — really — *honestly* my mother?"

"Silence!" thundered Mrs. Pinchin again, annihilating her with a glance.

So Corrie went home again, dragged back to it, as if all roads led to but that one terminal of life.

The clocks and chimes and whistles were just voicing the hour of noon, when Mrs. Pinchin's brougham passed out from between the Park's hedgerows into

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Central Park West, and turned along Seventy-fifth Street. Home again — and what a home, indeed! Licking her lips and wheezing, Mrs. Pinchin grasped her cane, and edging forward in her seat, she had the door opened before the brougham had come to the curb.

“Get out!” she growled succinctly; and Corrie having gotten out, Mrs. Pinchin turned to the coachman. “Wait here. I’m going back;” — and then to Corrie; “you come along with me.” Leaning on her stick she heaved up the steps, fished in her reticule for a pass key, waved Corrie inside, and then following, slammed the door behind her.

“Now, my girl,” said Mrs. Pinchin, darkly, “we’ll talk it all over. “You’re my daughter — yes! And you know who your father is, too — humh! Very well then! And so now,” she observed, unlocking the door of her private room; “mother and daughter ’ll go in here, for a while, and talk all this over from start to finish. I’m going to tell you all about it, daughter!” she cried in a mocking voice, brutal in her slumbering wrath, “because I want to get it all clear in your head. So now — now — ”

Mrs. Pinchin stopped, drew in her breath, while her jaw slowly fell. She stood with her fingers still on the knob, the door opened, and her eyes riveted on the room inside. Then her tongue spread out, thickly licking her upper lip; there was a momentary spasm in her throat that passed, leaving her jaws grinding together fiercely; and Mrs. Pinchin hopped forward and raised a terrible cry.

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For there stood Mrs. Pinchin's desk with its lid pried open and broken; and there was her safe with its door swinging wide; papers littered the floor as if a Gargantuan snow flaw had burst inside, and scattered the flakes broadcast; and over all this devastation, a fallen inkwell, tumbled from the desk, had splashed a torrent of black which had been ground in deeper amid the ruin by some ruthless heel.

Again Mrs. Pinchin's voice raised itself, echoing through the quiet house. She flung herself on her knees, snatching at the papers, unmindful of the dripping ink. Her hands, in a moment, were black with it; she paused long enough in her furious search, to brush back her veil, and a wide smear traced itself across her face, bringing out in ghastly contrast the pallor of her skin. "Gone! *Gone!* — Lost! — *Stolen!*" She raised her lamentation almost to the keyed-up stridency of a howl. "Stolen! — Gone! — Gone!" she wailed, sobbing it from the depth of her chest.

"*Mrs. Pinchin!*" gasped Corrie.

Then her eyes rolled around till she saw the girl at the door; and a terrible transformation spread over her convulsed and twitching features. "You!" she cried, and by a powerful effort, heaved herself massively to her feet. "You — you've got them. Give me back my Tollabee papers."

With a quick movement, she reached out a claw and dragged Corrie into the room. Panting now, hoisting up the breath from her lungs with an effort,

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Mrs. Pinchin slammed the door shut, and with a groping hand outstretched to support her, she planted her back against it.

"Give them up! Give them up!" she choked and pointed a gnarled, trembling finger at the girl. "You took them — and — give me back my Tollabee papers."

Outside in the hall, there was a scurry of feet; someone drummed frantically on the panels; an equally frantic voice begged Mrs. Pinchin to open up; and to add to the uproar, the doorbell, with a shrill, startling insistence, began to clatter in spurts.

Corrie clenched both hands at her side, and bent a frightened look at the swaying woman.

"The Tollabee papers! How did *you* get them, Mrs. Pinchin?" she cried.

Mrs. Pinchin made no answer to the question. "My papers — the papers you took!" she gasped, and her voice whispered it from far away, choking and minute. Into Mrs. Pinchin's face had come a brick-red glow, flinging its signals widely. "You can't g-go — leave the room — t-till I — I — my papers." One hand reached up, wandering to her throat. "Why, I — I — I feel so — —"

"Mrs. Pinchin! Mrs. Pinchin! — you are *not* my mother! You have not told me the truth. Where did you get the Tollabee papers?"

Again a fierce drumming on the panels, and Miss Maria's piercing voice, crying: "Let me in! Judie — Judie! Let me in!"

For one instant Mrs. Pinchin stared at Corrie

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blindly, her eyelids fluttering. "I—I—why, I cannot — *umh!* — what —— "

Moaning once, Mrs. Pinchin swayed, recovered herself, and then with a groan, pitched forward on her face. Her promised stroke had come.

CHAPTER XX

In which the tide turns from the ebb and bears back Mrs. Pinchin to the shores of Life. — The watcher by the bedside. — Why Corrie refused to see her lover. — Mrs. Pinchin regains consciousness. — Mrs. Pinchin's wink and its startling effects. — Margaret Tollabee learns tardily that she is, after all, a good soul.

UNQUESTIONABLY a fine state of affairs! The crash of that massive figure tumbling like an ox felled in the shambles was echoed instantly by a wilder pounding on the door. "Oh! will you let me in?" shrilled Miss Maria, and there followed another crash, as she backed off and threw her body against the panels. "Let me in! Let me in!"

But Mrs. Pinchin lay outstretched, her disordered bulk effectually obstructing the way. Her breath came slowly and noisily; her head had turned to one side, disclosing her gross and now more sensual profile, repellent in the suffused empurplement of its skin, and her hands, loose and incapable, upturned themselves amid the ink-stained litter on the floor. Surely enough, the stroke had come, just as she so frequently had promised herself.

Poor Corrie! As the heavy figure swayed forward, staggering, the girl had put out a hand to catch Mrs. Pinchin before she fell. But her arm owned no strength to support a bulk like that; she had been

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thrust backward by the weight. Recovering herself, she raised her voice in a cry of alarm, and then fell on her knees beside the prostrate woman.

“Let me in! Let me in!” babbled Miss Maria, struggling to force the door. “Owpen it oop! Owpen it oop!” came Maggie’s brogue, added to the clamor; and then a man’s voice raised itself. “Hi! hi! een there! — you!”

The girl made one ineffectual effort to drag Mrs. Pinchin’s form away. Then she reached over and turned the key; outside, all three were shoving against the panels, and the door slowly moved inward, pushing the inert figure on before it.

Miss Maria, aroused from her bed by Mrs. Pinchin’s shout, had sprung down the stairs without waiting to rearrange her attire. A flannel dressing-gown incompletely hid the fact that she wore a night-dress underneath, and her hair, done up into a meager braid, stood out behind her as stiff as a seaman’s tarry queue. “*Judie!*” she cried, as her eyes fell on the stricken figure. “Oh! — is she dead?” gasped Miss Maria. “Oh, *Judie!* — are you dead? — Are you? — Is she? — Tell me she is n’t dead!” she wailed, glancing terrifiedly at Corrie.

The girl had taken Mrs. Pinchin’s head in her lap. “Go get a doctor — someone! Quick! — run and get a doctor.” Maggie stood in the doorway, her mouth agape, and over her shoulder peered the startled face of Signore Alfuente. He had come, it appeared, to keep his engagement with Mrs. Pinchin, arriving at the crucial moment of that en-

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counter in the private room. "You — you, Mr. Alfuento. There's a doctor a few doors down the street. Oh, why don't you go? Maggie, you go!" she cried, as the musician seemed unable to understand.

Miss Maria's eyes suddenly had grown hard and vixenish. "What happened?" she demanded, and then she raised an accusing finger. "You did this. You're to blame! You've killed my poor sister — it was you! Oh, Judie — and I thought you were coming back to me!" wailed Miss Maria, and fell to beating her hands against her sides.

Both Maggie and the Signore had departed, the musician comprehending at last what was required of him. Miss Maria, clasping her hands on her breast, kneeled down beside Mrs. Pinchin. "Oh, Judie! — and I thought you'd go home with me again, and now — Oh, she's dead — dead!" sobbed Miss Maria, rocking to and fro.

"She's not dead," said Corrie, struggling to keep her wits; "you can hear her breathe. There! I think she's coming to. Don't you see her eyes?"

Miss Maria shoved Corrie away. She took Mrs. Pinchin's vast figure in her arms, and rocked her like a child. "Get away — get away from here, you wicked, wicked girl!" she cried at Corrie. "You've never made anything but trouble since you were born. Now you've killed her! Get away! — oh, Judie! Judie! Judie!"

They fetched a doctor from somewhere, a young man who came hurrying with his black leather pill

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bag, and another case of instruments. Maggie had found him, and from Maggie's hysteria, the young practitioner had n't been able to decide whether Mrs. Pinchin had fallen in a fit, or down an airshaft. But at a first glance he knew. "First or second stroke?" he asked briskly, going to work at once. "Second, I should say. Now calm yourself, madam;" this to Miss Maria who had begun again to rock to and fro. "Second? — ah, yes; I thought so! Hmph! Quite lame before, as I remember."

A moment later came a second physician, Mr. Alfuente trotting at his heels. "Morning, Bronson."

"Findlay. Patient of yours?"

The second comer shook his head. "Pretty bad?"

"Can't say yet. You'd better give me a hand here."

Together they got Mrs. Pinchin up the stairs, and laid her on the massive four-poster in her room. Miss Maria went with them, and Corrie, too. But at the door of Mrs. Pinchin's room, the dowdy, stoop-shouldered, weeping pitiable figure turned and barred the way. "You shall not come in here!" she said, drawing up her figure to its full height. "Go!" she said, and in her thin, uncomely face there shone, for the moment, a dignity of force and grandeur that transfigured Miss Maria almost to the point of nobility. "Go!" she repeated; "I shall care for my sister alone," she said, and closed the door in Corrie's face.

Mr. Alfuente, after the first momentary shock of dismay, had agreeably recovered himself; and now,

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so far from the thought of taking his departure, the gentleman stood in the drawing-room below, idly twirling his far-famed moustaches. Hearing Corrie's footfalls on the stair, he recovered himself even more completely, and with a flashing gleam of teeth and an even more alluring smile in his velvety eyes, threw himself into an attitude to await the young woman's coming.

Now, shall it be said that the foreign gentleman's chivalry and respect for women was of the same high order as that for which all the Continental males — and especially those of Latin origin — are so justly and unquestionably renowned? Yes — let us say so, indeed; for the musician was no exception to the rule. Corrie was only a paid dependent, so in order with the privileges of that historically perfect chivalry of his European kind, Corrie was to him fair prey for his blandishments. Kicking his foot behind him, smiling, twirling his moustache, and widening his greasy eyes, Mr. Alfuente advanced, determined to make good use of his *tête à tête* with his charming and unsuspecting *inamorata*.

“Oh!” exclaimed Corrie, and tried to retreat.

“Ah! You will not go till I hear? Your good lady, is she very ill?” said the Signore, only the *will* became *veal* in his insinuating appeal, while the *ill* squirmed out of his speech as an *eel*. “I stay with you here, prahapps, to hear the good rapport.”

Corrie said she could tell him nothing yet; if he cared to learn he must come again, later. Immediately another flashing smile. The Signore, indeed,

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would come again, and he would expect to see the fair young lady with the adorable eyes. Prahapps, when he ratturned, she again would see heem, and afterwards even go for what-d' you-cal-heem — ah! *si!* — a little stroll in the air.

It is questionable whether ever before in his career of European chivalry, the Signore received so immediate a return for his gallantry.

For after one look at him to make doubly sure of what he meant, Corrie turned on her heel, and with no change of expression in her face, departed, leaving the astonished musician to gape after her in dismay. Exit Signore Alfuente, thou of the mussed linen and velvet eyes. *Buon' giorn', addio! ta-ta, Signore;* for these pages shall see you no more.

Throughout the day, Mrs. Pinchin lay in her huge four-poster breathing stertorously, her face upturned to the ceiling. It was a large face, and one cast in a certain nobility of bigness that became almost Jovian in the moments of her wrath. But fate now had played queer tricks with Mrs. Pinchin's visage, sporting with it in unkindly ways; for one side of her mouth, whose nerve cells had been withered in the shock, was stitched up by a muscular contraction into the aspect of a tipsy leer. So hour after hour she lay there, impressively big even in the humility of her downfall; and hour after hour, with that same crapulous jocundity, her wrecked features simpered at the walls.

Beside her sat Miss Maria, waiting. Silenced as never before, the weak and pitiable shadow watched

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there, faithful as a dog beside its master's bier. Her face was screwed now into a point of quiet attention; she had fixed her eyes on Mrs. Pinchin's face, and, as hour after hour, the noisy breathing wheezed away in the quiet, her vigil never lapsed. Somewhere within call, the young doctor waited; and another had been summoned, an eminent specialist who was to come presently and read the verdict — either a reprieve, or to hand Mrs. Pinchin the death warrant. There was the nurse, too — a young girl in cap and apron, wearing a cool, blue-striped, muslin gown that rustled quietly. For Mrs. Pinchin, even on the brink where all things end, must have all that life offered to the last.

Which way now? Shall we say that night came, and that in the night, Mrs. Pinchin's soul went screaming on its way aloft to that great Court of courts where the Judge of judges sits Him at the bar? Or shall we stick to the literal facts? Come!

No, Mrs. Pinchin did not die. The hours dragged on into the dark, and when the city lights came gleaming through the dusk, winking like Heaven's host of eyes above, her hand moved, scratching the coverlid, as if it beckoned life back again to the wrecked frame that so long had cherished and indulged it. Night — and the creeping tide that waits to bear onward the multitude that lie waiting for the journey. But the night-tide came, and Mrs. Pinchin roused herself, valiant and not yet lost; and when the night-tide came and passed, there she lay,

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that wraithless effigy of a grin still stitched on her face, but knowing she had dragged back to the shattered cell both precious life and reason. No, indeed; Mrs. Pinchin did not die.

“Judie! — Judie!” whispered the gray watcher at the bedside.

Mrs. Pinchin heard her call, and acknowledged it with one fluttering eyelid that winked tipsily in fellowship with her fixed and tipsy leer.

During these fated hours, Corrie had become a negligible quantity in Mrs. Pinchin’s house. Hour after hour, she too, sat waiting, alone and deeply thoughtful, pondering in a corner of the drawing-room. For what if Mrs. Pinchin died? At every shuffle of feet along the floor above, her heart leaped, hearing in every sound the coming tidings of the end. Day went by, and came nightfall; still she sat there. When the servants offered food, she shook her head, and so the hours passed. The chime in the hall outside boomed unheeded — ten! — eleven! — twelve! — midnight! and Corrie still sat there.

“You are going to bed soon?” inquired the young doctor, with an interest and sympathy that even the cloak of his grave manner could not hide. “You can do nothing by sitting up.”

“I suppose not,” answered Corrie, weakly. “Will she recover?”

He answered that it was too soon to say. “But I think so,” he added, with unprofessional candor, or, rather, pity. “Mrs. Pinchin is a relative, is n’t she?” he inquired.

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"She is my mother," answered Corrie, and whispered to herself the question, "Is she?"

The young physician repressed a start of astonishment. "I did n't — Ah, yes; I see." But it was extremely improbable that he did see; for to him and to the remainder of the neighborhood, it was indeed news to learn that Mrs. Pinchin's *dame de compagnie* was her offspring. A little disconcerted, he sought to change the conversation.

"Your mother, Miss Pinchin" — oh, good Heavens! thought Corrie — "your mother must have experienced some grave mental shock?"

"Yes," answered Corrie, dully; "a bundle of valuable papers was stolen from her. She had just found it out."

"Indeed! — and the police have not been here yet?" Astonishment again peeped out from under his usual air of gravity. Corrie began twisting her fingers together in her lap.

"No, the police have not been notified. It was not the kind of robbery that would interest them. We know, too, who did it."

In downright amazement now he gaped at her, dignity no longer able to struggle with his amazement. Then, for the first time, Corrie realized into what degree of frankness her indifference had led her, and she, too, became a little disconcerted. "I think, if you 'll excuse me, I will go now. You say she has recovered consciousness?"

Yes; though the motor nerves of one side of her form had been damaged; but how extensive the

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paralysis would be, and to what degree it would leave her a cripple, only time could tell. "How long ago, exactly, may I ask?" he inquired, "was the other stroke — the one that left her lame?"

"I don't know," answered Corrie, and when a few minutes later the young doctor went down the steps, he turned and looked up at Mrs. Pinchin's. "Well, I'm blowed!" he muttered to himself, succinctly, if not elegantly.

There was, of course, no question who had robbed Mrs. Pinchin, and had, at the same time, so brought about her downfall. If there were any doubts in the matter, it required only a little reflection to identify the thief. The one incident of that first morning was enough — the moment when Corrie hidden behind the clock had watched the singular Mr. Stanton at work on the lock of Mrs. Pinchin's private room. Furthermore, when Uncle Stanwood had discovered Corrie watching him, he had not been able, even with all his usual coolness, to screw his face into an expression that would argue pleasure at being discovered in his investigation of locked doors and keyholes. Corrie had noted his guilt, and while she knew nothing of the wax that Mrs. Pinchin had subsequently found in the lock, and which Mr. Stanton-Stanwood Geikie had doubtless used to record an impression of what the said keyhole looked like, she was still certain that no one else could be the guilty person.

But what was Uncle Stanwood's interest in the papers? Were they really documents affecting the

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Tollabees? For if one considered Miss Margaret Tollabee's statement that the Tollabee fortune was gone, no papers relating to the estate could be of much value now. And certainly, Uncle Stanwood was not one to perpetrate a theft, unless it were of some value to him? But what were the papers? — what? — what? —

She remembered then the papers of which Mr. Biggamore had spoken — the ones that if once found would clear the memory of Philip Geikie's dead father. Were they the ones? — or —

Said Corrie as she got into bed in the dark:

“I think my head is going to split. Oh, why did I turn Phil away from the door, to-day?”

Turn Phil away from the door? Oh, yes! Maggie had taken the message, — not once, but twice.

“Sure, an’ ain’t I a-tellin’ ye again? ’T will be more to the likes av a funeral we ’re havin’ than them parties av a Sunday evening, I dunno. An’ she says she ’ll be writing ye all about it.”

So Phil had gone away, perplexed and down-hearted, and after wiping out her eyes with cold water, Corrie had returned to the drawing-room corner. For — “Oh! oh!” Corrie wept to herself, “if I see him again I ’ll give in. He ’ll make me, and I won’t — won’t — won’t! I ’m not going to ruin his life — I can’t! I won’t! Oh!”

But now? — “And now I ’ve got to send for him!” cried Corrie, as she buried her face in the pillows. “I won’t!” she snapped, and sat bolt upright staring through the dark. “If I see him, I

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know what will happen — and I won't! won't! won't!"

Chin in hand, she leaned forward to stare through the dark.

"Know what I'll do?" said Corrie to herself, and clenched her teeth. "I'll send for Mr. Biggamore. That's what I'll do," said Corrie, as if she fully meant the threat. "That's what I'll do!"

Then she buried her head in the pillows again. "My heart can just break, if it wants to," she muttered; and outside, in the city, the clocks boomed the hour of one.

Downstairs in the darkened sick room, the gray shadow still watched, waiting there beside the huge form stretched in the huge four-poster. A finger scratched upon the counterpane.

"Yes, Judie."

There was in the gray watcher's solicitude as she leaned over the bed something of a mother's caressing love as she bends above the cradle of her first born.

"What is it, Judie, dear?"

One side of the large mask grinning up from among the pillows twitched with an effort, and a disjointed mumble came thickly from the crippled lips.

"Mar-r-rr-ret Toll-l—ll-l — yur-rr-r — good soul."

In the dark the waterworks started again, spouting quietly and unseen. In the dark, also, Mrs. Pinchin's face went on staring at the ceiling, her mouth

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wried into the semblance of a tipsy leer. So passed the night away, and then came dawn. Mrs. Pinchin lived; but just the same, as if she did or did n't, New York awoke, and in West Seventy-fifth Street, the first housemaids began scrubbing off the stoops.

CHAPTER XXI

Disclosing one way in which irrepressible Nature plays its little jokes. — Mrs. Pinchin's plight. — The scene in the sick room. — The thief revealed. — Mrs. Pinchin trifles with the death-dealing thunderbolts. — Miss Maria's plea for a confession. — Mrs. Pinchin acknowledges her wrong. — Showing the curious informality of a woman who strove to preserve a good name. — Mr. Stanton proposes but Corrie disposes. — Corrie Who? again. — Miss Maria determines to tell. — Mr. Biggamore summoned.

AND so nature plays her little jokes when the time comes to pay up.

No — as it has been said — Mrs. Pinchin did not die. Mrs. Pinchin lived, and would continue to live, though life would become for her no such merry existence as her past had been. For now, in reparation of those years of slothful and self-indulgent cosseting, Mrs. Pinchin, if she cared to remain on earth instead of under it, must adapt herself to a course so virtuous that it would not admit even of cakes and ale. Frankly, no more gorging, nibbling, sipping. No more showing off of fine gowns, fine jewels and the like. No more parties. No more social plunges; none of those big and little things she loved so much. No more of anything, in fact, but a quiet, abstemious, and, to her, utterly obdurate existence hardly worth the trouble of continuing. Kind of a

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grisly joke, was n't it, that Nature played on Mrs. Pinchin?

Corrie did not send for Mr. Biggamore — at least, not yet. That morning Phil arrived at Mrs. Pinchin's door, and again was turned away. Later came an appealing note, which in turn went unanswered. Presently, the telephone jingled frantically, but with no better luck.

“If I see him, he 'll make me. If I write to him, I 'll have to. If I telephone him, it will be worse, because I never could talk over a telephone anyway, and know what I was saying.” Corrie wept timidly and then dried her eyes. “But I won't be able to hold out much longer,” said Corrie, “if he keeps on ringing the doorbell.”

In which way, three days passed by under Mrs. Pinchin's roof.

During these days Corrie saw nothing of Miss Maria, though of what went on in the sick room, she was, hour by hour, informed. Mrs. Pinchin had so far recovered herself as to be able to speak; there were even indications she would regain the use of her arm. Presently it was thought Mrs. Pinchin might be able to walk again, though with a still more aggravated limp. Corrie listened intently, receiving these bulletins with an impassive calm that again affected the young doctor curiously. But though Corrie was aware of his growing wonderment, she was too honest to pretend affection for the stricken woman, even though Mrs. Pinchin were her mother. And is she? — thought Corrie miserably.

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But deep down in the girl's heart there grew a new and solemn feeling for that grim recusant, who, though battled off her feet, still fought from the ground with no cry for quarter. It was a feeling of pity, and mixed with it, a recurring respect.

On the morning of the third day, and just after the doctor had gone, Miss Maria emerged from her vigil by the bedside. She came down the stairs, her list slippers making no sound on the treads, and gliding into the drawing-room, silently crooked a finger at the girl.

Corrie recognized the signal; it was an expected summons, though she had not looked for it so soon. Days before, she had told Mrs. Pinchin that even to the hour of her dying, she would await the explanation; and while this was not to be a death-bed confessional, Corrie, none the less, knew the moment to be portentous. So at the heels of her silent guide, she climbed the stairs, her mind in a tumult.

The young nurse was coming out of Mrs. Pinchin's room, the day's chart in her hand. "Be very quiet with her, won't you, Miss Pinchin?" she warned; "and don't stay too long." Then she smiled kindly; this was the stricken woman's daughter, and naturally she must see her.

"I promise," said Corrie, quietly; and Miss Maria opened the door.

But whether the young nurse would have been so placid about it, had she known; or whether the young doctor would have permitted it, had they asked him, are two questions that are, perhaps, best

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answered by themselves. There on the pillows lay the heavy-tortured face, staring up at the ceiling with that same mirthless effigy of a grin, and there was the one opened eye that leered at Corrie with the semblance of a wink.

Her lips moved and she spoke. These pages shall make no effort to mimic faithfully, nor to simulate in any way, the thick-tongued effort of her speech; for it was as painful in its way, and as sorry as the maimed lips that uttered it. Mrs. Pinchin spoke, and that is quite enough. She turned her head, coiled with its coarse and dark ropey braids, and mutely signaled the girl to bend closer. On the four-poster's other side was Miss Maria, waiting and still watching.

"Girl, was it you that broke into my room below?"

Corrie started in astonishment; this was hardly what she had expected. "No, Mrs. Pinchin," she answered, and in the heat of the moment, it was on the tip of her tongue to say she might be Mrs. Pinchin's daughter, but still she was not a thief. "No," said Corrie; "I did n't. Need I tell you that?"

"There!" exclaimed Miss Maria, as if emphasizing *I told you so.*

"You have n't been in there? And you have n't seen the papers? And you don't know who took them?" Mrs. Pinchin mumbled the three questions, and closed her one able eye, breathing softly while she waited.

"I have n't seen them," answered Corrie, quietly; "but I think I know who took them."

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A long pause; Mrs. Pinchin's breast heaved with a deep inspiration. "Who?" she queried, and the one word was breathed forth like a choking sigh.

"Stanwood Geikie — Mr. Stanton."

"Oh!" cried Miss Maria, unprepared to hear his name, the cry wrung out of her willy nilly. She half arose from her chair.

They had warned Mrs. Pinchin already that any stress of excitement would be fatal. But Mrs. Pinchin lay here now, trifling with the thunderbolts. Grim Mrs. Pinchin — able and courageous! *Te moribundi salutamus!*

"Oh!" gasped Miss Maria.

A gnarled finger scratched irritably on the coverlid. Miss Maria sat down.

"Who?" inquired Mrs. Pinchin, after a pause.

Corrie repeated the name; it seemed convincing enough; and Mrs. Pinchin again breathed deeply. "Humh-h!" she grunted.

"Judie — is n't that enough? You know they told you you must be very quiet. I would n't —"

Again the thick finger scratched irritably on the counterpane. Mrs. Pinchin was reserving both her breath and herself for a further effort.

"He has n't shown you what he stole? You don't know anything about it?" she still persisted.

Corrie breathed a little desperate sigh of her own. Nothing, it seemed, was there in this world to break down the implacable resolve of that grim and unrelenting spirit — not even the imminence of death, or its escape from it.

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"Mrs. Pinchin — *no!* But won't you answer a question of mine? Won't you please tell me whether you are really my mother? I have been told so, but you have not admitted it yet. I think I'd rather know the truth now, whatever it is, than to go on in miserable doubt. Please," said Corrie, gently; "won't you please tell me?"

Miss Maria got up and stood by the bed. "Ah! Judie — *now!*" she groaned, and held out both her hands in appeal. "Think how I've begged for years!"

The finger scratched once on the covering, and paused. Mrs. Pinchin's eye rolled around, and then with an effort, she moved her head on the pillows. Miss Maria's arms were thrust out a little further, and there was a suggestion that Miss Maria had plans of falling on her knees. Angrily, once again, the finger scratched its displeasure; but Mrs. Pinchin's eye closed, and she seemed to muse.

A full minute passed, the clock on Mrs. Pinchin's mantel ticking swiftly, as if with a galloping urgency of haste. But Mrs. Pinchin took her time. Once her eye opened, looked at Corrie and closed again. Afterward, the thick eyelid lifted wide enough for a peep at Miss Maria. Mrs. Pinchin mused a little more.

"Yes; I guess so," she said, as if in answer to a question; and then she looked quietly in Corrie's face. Miss Maria clasped her hands together, and the waterworks got ready.

"I'm your mother," said Mrs. Pinchin, slowly;

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"I will not deny it now. Yes," said Mrs. Pinchin, and slowly closed her eye. "I'm your mother!"

"Oh, my God," said Miss Maria, with great simplicity; and buried her face in her hands.

Corrie, dazed and overwhelmed, stared at her as if she could not believe: yet after all, what else was there to do? There was no reason to doubt it now; Mrs. Pinchin had made her confession, and why at this extremity should she tell anything but the truth? Corrie pressed both hands to her cheeks, and looked down at the woman lying on the bed.

"Mother! — then how could you have treated me so? Mother, how could you do it?"

"Because —" rumbled Mrs. Pinchin, in a weak, irresolute voice; and then she paused. Her eye had closed, and the mouth stitched up into its wried travesty of mirth, tried to work its lips together. Afterward, her throat, tinted to the hue of stained ivory, rippled with a little spasmodic reflex of swallowing, and when she spoke again, it was in a voice that made no concealment of its sincerity and anguish.

"Because, I'd tried to keep it from you. I could not let you know. I tried to hide the truth, and not to let you understand. I did n't know what might happen if you found out. I could n't let you."

"But mother; why were you so unkind and unfeeling and cruel? Why were n't you just a little kind? — And why did n't you let me know, mother? I was your own child and I would have understood. Don't you see that I could have loved

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you, then, and thought of you, as a child should think of its mother? But you would n't let me, and now it 's all too late — though I 'll try to love you. You are my mother — but why — Oh! how could you treat me so mother? ”

“ Because — ” said Mrs. Pinchin, and licked her lips. “ Because,” she said again and rolled her eye around. “ Why, because I was too — because I — I had to think of my *virtue!* ”

“ Oh my God! ” said Miss Maria, with completeness, and rose unsteadily to her feet.

“ I remembered my shame,” croaked Mrs. Pinchin, and said no more.

It was the nurse who brought the situation to a close. Whether by chance, or through some instinct of her profession that warned of what was going on, she popped in her head at the door just as Mrs. Pinchin had made her declaration. Instantly, the quick eye told what was wrong, and with no further ado, the nurse ordered both Corrie and Miss Maria from the room, and set to work on her patient.

But even then Mrs. Pinchin was not to die. Once again, she had played with the thunderbolts, and juggled them at will; unscathed, she still lived, inviolate.

Poor Corrie! After a half-hour at it, she sat up on her bed, looked feverishly across at the dressing-glass, and then got up and bathed her eyes in cold water. *Eau de cologne* might have done better, as it is the usual remedy prescribed for young heroines

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in such extremities; but Corrie did n't own any and it 's doubtful whether she would have used it if she had. Still cold water does pretty well, after all; and when an hour later she came down the stairs, she was more or less restored,— that is, in color, if not in spirits.

For now, after all the ups and downs of hope, life had established itself for her in a rut so desperately hopeless that it was hardly worth the anguish of traveling such a road. It was a road that led nowhere except back to the starting point. Who walked upon it, though innocent of the fault that set them there, journeyed alone, shunned and desolate. Corrie owned no philosophy to help look on the brighter side. There was no brighter side, of course; and she sat down in a corner of the drawing-room and stared at the pattern of the carpet.

It was a body Brussels carpet, a florid, extraordinary weave, selected according to Mrs. Pinchin's curious taste. On a field maroon bloomed exotically, incredibly exotic roses of a hue and size unimaginable. Its border was an arrangement of pale green daisies set between lines of magenta; and the lines, gathering in a complicated scroll work at the corners, swept along beside the wainscot, loudly crying attention from the eye. Unconsciously, one's eye followed the track around the room, released from its thrall only when a piece of furniture broke in on the continuity of that rowdy strip. So Corrie, poring on the carpet, began to follow its border line with a moody thoughtfulness.

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She did not hear the key clicking in the door outside. Nor was she aware afterwards of the door slowly opening, and then, as slyly closing. Her glance fixed subconsciously on the scrollwork in the nearest corner, spun dizzily among its arabesques and then darted down the room to the next corner, where it paused long enough to disentangle itself from the curlycues. Subsequently, it skipped along down the wainscot toward the door, dodging on the way a fat, gilt chair; a stand with brass legs and claw feet; and an enameled milking stool decorated with a garter of pink ribbon; and arriving at the *portières*, came to a full stop of astonishment at the sight of a pair of shoes.

They were men's shoes, and in them was a man.

"Ah, my dear young girl," said Mr. Stanton, pushing aside the hangings; "how very fortunate to find you here alone."

She started up, her lips parted, her hand flying to her breast. Speechless, Corrie looked at him, and had Uncle Stanwood not turned at the moment to draw the *portières* a little closer, he would have seen the look of repugnance rising in her eyes.

"It is charming to see you again, my dear," he said, strolling toward her, one hand elegantly stroking a whisker tip; "most pleasant, particularly when I came here for that very purpose. Won't you sit down again?"

Corrie managed to speak. "What do you wish, Mr. Stanton?" she asked in a voice that was gentle,

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because she had not been able to raise it above a whisper. "Why do you come here — now?"

"To see you, my dear. A very good reason, too, I should say." Mr. Stanton smiled pleasantly, and drew up a chair. "You will be seated, won't you?" He glanced smilingly toward the door. "We are alone, and there is something I have to say."

Again with an effort, Corrie spoke. "What is it you wish, Mr. Geikie?"

"Ah! my name — yes, of course." He again motioned to the chair. "But I beg you to sit down."

Because Corrie's knees seemed too weak to sustain her, she sat or rather fell upon a chair.

"Yes — Geikie, of course. My dear, there were many reasons why it was necessary to obscure my real identity under the other name.

"In the first place, one of my position could not afford to mix on terms of equality with the persons I have met here. Rather singular acquaintances Mrs. Pinchin has — don't you think so? But amusing — amusing! You cannot fancy how much sport I have had in watching them at their social antics." Corrie fixed her eyes on him intently, as he threw back his head to laugh lightly. "You see," he continued, "I came here to watch them, they were so thoroughly entertaining; though, of course, I couldn't permit persons like that to know me. A man in my position couldn't afford it. No, indeed; it would have declassed me among my friends."

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Friends? thought Corrie; former friends, perhaps, by whom he was already too well known to suffer any further disparagement. Mr. Stanton beamed anew, as he again began tugging at his whisker tip.

"However, my dear, it was not on the topic of Mrs. Pinchin's queer acquaintances that I came to see you. No, it was on a matter much more important to yourself. About you, in fact," said Uncle Stanwood, and hitched his chair a little closer.

"My dear girl," he murmured abruptly, "I have come to make a reparation. Ah, don't think I have n't seen what has been going on in this house. It has been cruel and shameful — a young girl, sweet and unprotected — and then to be treated so. Oh, I think it abominable, shameful! — and I wonder that Mrs. Pinchin has allowed it."

The girl felt her heart leap, drum wildly in her breast, and then subside, leaving the color drawn from her face. "Mr. Stanton, did you come here to tell me this?" she asked, in a fluttering voice. "Do you think I 'll listen to you — *to you*, mocking me like that, when I know what part you have had in it? Stand aside and let me pass. You! — — —"

"I?" interrupted Mr. Stanton. "I had nothing to do with it. On the contrary, I did my best to prevent it."

Corrie fell back in her chair, her eyes distended. What did he mean? "You had *nothing* to do with it?" she cried, and felt her heart leap again. "Do you give me your word of honor — — —" She laughed

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wildly. What would a creature like this scamp of a father know of a thing like *honor*. "Do you mean to tell me that *you* are not the one responsible? Who was, then?" she cried scornfully; "since you seem to know."

Uncle Stanwood eyed her in some astonishment. "My dear girl! I refer to my scoundrelly young nephew, and the shameful way he has treated you. This is what I mean. I fail to see how I could have prevented it," observed Mr. Stanton, blandly; "though I really tried — I really did. You saw how the young whelp tried to assault me when he found I had learned of his villainy."

Corrie stilled an hysterical desire to laugh and an equally wild impulse to throw back her head and scream. Uncle Stanwood crossed his knees, and with a hand gracefully clutching one lapel of his coat and the other idly combing out his flowing whisker, leaned back pleasantly and smiled. But Uncle Stanwood smiled often — he was always smiling; and never before had the girl felt so complete and degrading a horror for the man as that which now began to steal upon her.

"What *is* it that you mean, Mr. Stanton — Mr. Geikie?" she corrected herself. "Why have you come here to see me?"

"Why? — oh, that is a very simple matter to tell you. My dear young girl, I come here to pay you the very highest courtesy in my power." He raised his hand to still her. "No — wait before you say anything. I must fully explain myself." Drawing

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his chair even a little nearer, Mr. Stanton leaned toward her ; and at the look on his face, the girl shrank away. " Dear girl," said Mr. Stanton, softly, " I know how that young scoundrel has forced himself on you, only in the end to show himself in his true colors. I know all about it, since Mrs. Pinchin has told me. But I do not wish you to think all the men of his family are like *him*. No, I should like you to believe one, at least, is honorable, whatever you think of the others. Now this young blackguard has thrown you over ; he has led you on, only to jilt you, as I have been informed, and, therefore, I wish to make amends. Besides, I have seen that I am not utterly distasteful to you." He glanced at her as if further to assure himself so. " I recall, you know," said Mr. Stanton, affectionately, " your efforts to rescue me from that young cub, Sunday night, when, 'pon my soul, I believe he was bent on murdering me. Yes." There he paused, and again looked swiftly at the girl. " Oh, come!" exclaimed Mr. Stanton, abruptly, " what 's the use of my beating around the bush? You see what I 'm driving at. The long and short of it is that I offer you a name and home, my girl, — something you 've never had before. Why, a girl in your fix ought to jump at the chance. Come! is it a go?"

Corrie got to her feet, though how, she was not quite sure. Her heart had begun its leaping again, and in her soul was an aversion so complete and terrible that she could only stare at him bewitched. Then a hysterical, senseless ripple of laughter burst

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from her lips. "To go with you — a home! — and a name!"

"Oh, yes," assured Mr. Stanton, benevolently; "I offer marriage."

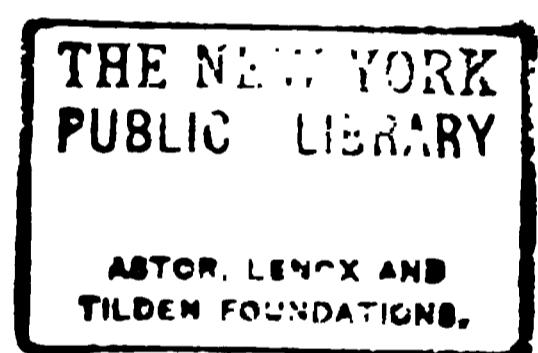
Corrie pushed the chair between them and measured the distance to the door. "Then, Mr. Stanwood Geikie," she said with a slow and cutting distinctness, "you are *not* my father after all. Thank God, I am saved that shame. I see that you are nothing but a common thief and cheat."

And before his hand could reach her, she was gone, racing up the stairs, her heart in despite its terror and aversion singing a wild pæan of joy, in the overwhelming relief of discovery. For she was free now! Free, she sang! They could not lie to her and trick her any more. Uncle Stanwood was *not* her father. Mrs. Pinchin was *not* her mother. She was sure of it — as sure as the sun was in the sky. As sure as she lived and breathed and *knew*. Free! yes! Free again, and once more Corrie Robinson. She was Corrie *Who?* if you like, and to add to that, Corrie *What?* if you choose. But the old certainty of doubt hung above her now like a glorious benediction. Not *her* child. Nor *his* child! And in the joy of the discovery, what else could matter?

No, what else? thought Corrie, panting as she leaned against her door and locked it. "I must try to think," she said weakly, putting a hand to her brow; "I must try to think it out." Presently, she slipped down to the floor, and sat there, her back



" You see what I'm driving at. The long and short of it is that I offer you a name and home, my girl, — something you've never had before."



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against the panels. "I can't think, of course. No one *could*. But what's the use of thinking, anyway? I might just as well know."

Rising to her feet, Corrie cautiously opened the door and listened. Then she walked to the stairs and peeped. No one was in sight; the house lay still. After a moment's reflection, she walked down to the floor below, and leaned over the balusters.

"Maggie! Oh, Maggie!" called Corrie, in a modulated voice. Maggie was in the dining room. "Yes, ma'am!"

"Maggie, see whether there is any one in the drawing-room." Maggie favored her with a blank stare, and then with her head tipped over inquiringly, went and looked.

"Never a one, ma'am," she reported concisely.

"Are you sure?"

"And I *am* that! Did n't I take the full av me eyes to every corner? But maybe was you expecting somewan, y'd better be lookin' yerself. Is it the young man, I dunno?"

"If he calls," replied Corrie, majestically, "you may say that I am home to him."

Maggie returned to her work. "Ow! glory be! an' what d' ye think av that!"

But Corrie heard no echo of this concrete observation. She had already disappeared into the bedroom at her left.

"Miss Maria," said Corrie, closing the door behind her, "I wish to speak to you."

Inasmuch as Corrie had dispensed with the for-

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mality of knocking, Miss Maria turned around with a startled exclamation.

"Miss Maria," said Corrie, her hands clenched together at her sides, "Mr. Stanton — I mean Mr. Stanwood Geikie, was here a few minutes ago. I talked to him."

Perhaps a half minute went by; Corrie waited patiently. She saw first a deeper gray steal into Miss Maria's gray features; then she saw her catch her breath. Afterwards Miss Maria blinked; wet her thin lips, and put a hand to her lean, slender throat. "Then —" The word came in a gagging whisper; Miss Maria tried again. "Then he told you everything?" she blurted out, and in her voice there was neither regret nor terror, but a great and convulsing relief. Somehow, she scrambled to her feet, and stood clinging to the chair back. "It would be like him," she said simply, and wet her lips again. "He had told you, then?"

"No, Miss Maria. He only asked me to marry him."

"He asked you — *you*, you say! — to marry him? — Oh! ! !"

But no rank of slender types standing at attention could give to the words the force Miss Maria put into them. "He asked you to — *that man!* ! ! ! " Another little row of slim soldiers firing another volley. "Oh, this is too much. I will not stand it any longer! And oh, merciful God! — to think what I have suffered for him. Let me by," said Miss Maria, and struggled toward the door.

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"No! wait a moment, Miss Maria." Corrie leaned against the door, and clenched her hands a little tighter. "You cannot trick and befuddle me any more. I've stood it all my life, and now you've got to tell me. If I go to Mrs. Pinchin with this, you know what will happen to her. But Miss Maria, it's killing me, too. And why should I think of her when she has never shown me anything but cruelty? Will you tell me now?" asked Corrie, quietly, but determinedly.

Miss Maria made one ineffectual effort to get by her. "Is Mrs. Pinchin my mother?" demanded Corrie, a hand outstretched.

"No," said Miss Maria, desperately.

"And Stanwood Geikie is n't my father?"

"No! Oh, my God, no!" Miss Maria clasped her hands together in appeal. "Let me out now, won't you? As He is my judge, I swear I tell you the truth!"

"Who am I then? I think you know."

Miss Maria's eyes went from side to side, like a rat trying to escape.

"Give me a little time. Yes, I know. But give me a little time, won't you? — just an hour will do. I can't tell you like this. Give me an hour. Don't you see I've got to get my wits back? I wish to tell you. Oh, I do! Don't be so cruel to me. Be a little kind, Corrie — my own little girl is dead! That poor, poor little girl I took you to see. She's dead, and they buried her all alone. She's in her grave, Corrie — think of that! — and my sister would n't let me go

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and see her buried. Won't you have a little mercy? Ah, don't be so cruel, Corrie. I've been a little kind to you — not always cruel and wicked. They buried her all alone, Corrie. I could n't go because Judie would n't let me. She said she'd die of fear if I left her. Give me just an hour now, won't you please?"

Then Corrie realized. The veil was torn away — that cheating swindling fabric of lies — and she knew. "How could you do it, Miss Maria?" asked Corrie, plaintively. She leaned over the frail, quivering, unlovely, weeping creature, and put an arm around her. "How could you do it? — poor, wicked, foolish woman! How could you?"

Miss Maria shook against her shoulder for a moment, and then freed herself. "Send for Mr. Biggamore," she gasped, and fled through the door.

CHAPTER XXII

Depicting the arrival of the envoy extraordinary at Mrs. Pinchin's stronghold. — How Phil was told to go to the deuce. — Miss Maria reveals herself. — The story of Margaret Tollabee and an inventory of her deceits. — Randolph Tollabee's stepsisters, and the rascally Stanwood Geikie. — How Miss Maria got down on her knees. — The interrupted elopement. — Judie's allowance, and what happened when it was stopped. — How Miss Margaret's prayers were answered.

IT was an hour later, when Mr. Biggamore, hurrying to the urgency of the summons, came panting up the steps. The little gentleman's cheeks were puffed out with excitement, and after pushing the bell button, not once, but twice, and then, after reflection, a third time, he fished for his handkerchief and wrung forth such a trumpet blast as to fill all Seventy-fifth Street with its clarion echoes. *What ho, within there!* And instantly, within there, Mrs. Pinchin's figurative castle awoke with the figurative unbarring of the grated gates and an equally figurative raising of the portcullis, whereupon the still bugling envoy extraordinary pranced inside the stronghold.

“Well, young lady! And *now*, what's up?” inquired Mr. Biggamore, concisely, if not formally.

Corrie closed the door, and speechlessly waved him into the drawing-room.

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“Furthermore,” said Mr. Biggamore, severely, making at the same time a painful effort to recover both his composure and his breath, “what have you been doing to that young nephew of mine, these last few days?”

Corrie nervously twisted her fingers together. “I don’t know, Mr. Biggamore. Why?”

The little gentleman paused long enough to awake the echoes with another fanfare. “That is for you to tell me!” he retorted, after blowing out his cheeks. “Just now I meet him skulking at the corner, and when I inquire what he is doing there, he mumbles an unintelligible reply, and darts off down the street. I believe,” said Mr. Biggamore, indignantly, “that he told me to go to the deuce. I decline to go to the deuce. I will go there for no one, and much less for him. He may go to the dickens!” exclaimed Mr. Biggamore; and then, “I beg your pardon.”

But after tugging his forelock long enough to regain himself, Mr. Biggamore left off, and peered at her. “What’s up? — happened, I mean.”

“I am going to marry Phil!” said Corrie, blushing frightfully. “Yes — that is, I think so — if he’ll still have me.”

Mr. Biggamore sat down suddenly and put his hands on his knees. “I beg your pardon. You said —?”

“If I’m who I think I am,” added Corrie, quietly.

“But you’re Mrs. Pinchin’s daughter.” By an extremely narrow margin, Mr. Biggamore averted an

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explosion. Great credit here, for the little gentleman's heroism;— he might blow up subsequently, but he was still holding the prow against the bank.

“No—I am not!” said Corrie. Her chubby *vis-à-vis* was still manfully containing himself long enough for the allegorical women and children to get ashore. “No—and I’m not in the least—well, not related to Stanwood Geikie, you know. Miss Maria has said so.”

“Miss Maria? Now who in the—I beg your pardon. Oh, yes; I’d forgotten there was another female mixed up in this.”

“And you still don’t know who she is?” inquired Corrie. There a footfall sounded in the hall; Miss Maria had heard the doorbell; and if one considers what lay on Miss Maria’s mind and soul, she must have arisen and come to that summons like the condemned, who, on the fated dawn, hears the prison bell begin to toll. With her eyes set before her, she trudged along the hall, in her hands a bundle of papers that she held up like a crucifix; and parting the hangings at the door, she marched straight across the room to Mr. Biggamore. There she paused, and looked at him, about as Lady Jane Grey must have looked at the headsman when she took her place at the block.

“This is Miss Maria,” said Corrie, with a little frown of compassion.

But there, like Jim Bludso—or Jim Bludso’s boat—Mr. Biggamore gave up. Or, rather, he blew up.

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“Why, it’s Margaret Tollabee!” he exploded, and stood with his mouth agape.

“Yes, Mr. Biggamore. And now that you have driven us into a corner, it’s time to end the farce.” Miss Maria perched herself sideways on the edge of a chair, and blinked at him almost stolidly.

“But your hair — *her* hair!” cried Mr. Biggamore, dumbfoundedly; “it was snow white. I looked at it particularly.”

“A wig,” answered Miss Maria, explicitly, in a small, expressionless voice. “I’ve got it put away in a bandbox.”

Then, as if by inspiration, Corrie recalled the bandbox that Mrs. Pinchin had brought home with her, and which she had so jealously guarded from Miss Freedlark’s gaily prying curiosity.

“Did *she* go and buy it? Mrs. Pinchin made you put it on?”

“Yes; Judie thought I’d better wear one,” answered Miss Maria, frankly. “I was a fool.” Then she sighed. “She asked me to use an ear trumpet, too, because you’d have to speak up louder, Mr. Biggamore, and she wanted to hear what you’d say. She was behind the folding door.” Miss Maria drew a deep breath through her nose. “But I wouldn’t act a lie like that. The wig was as far as I’d go.”

Mr. Biggamore clung to his knee-caps, as if the solid ground were about to swim out from under, and leave him hanging in space.

“You see here!” he blurted out, indignantly;

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“what ’d you two women mean — like that! — by making a fool of me? ”

Miss Maria meekly dropped her eyes. She played with her fingers for a moment, and then suddenly looked up. In the moment, her face had squared itself with determination, and she thrust out her lower lip.

“Listen! ” said Miss Maria, whom one must still so term, though she was really Margaret Tollabee; “now listen to me! ” she said harshly. “I ’m willing to tell everything; but first of all, I ’m going to make a bargain.” She swung around in her chair until she faced Corrie. “Will you promise, if I tell — will you promise on your sacred word of honor, you won’t do anything to Judie — not sue us, or do anything like that? ”

Mr. Biggamore leaped excitedly to his feet. “Refuse! Don’t you do it! It ’s outrageous! There may be the money, too. How do we know who ’s got it? ”

Miss Maria turned to him scornfully. “Is this a time to talk of money? Do you suppose this girl thinks of money? Ah! how I hate the sound of it! — *money?* when I ’m going to tell her who she is? We can account for every penny of it, and I ’ll surprise you too, when I come to that. Money! Faugh! Is it a promise? ”

“If you ’ll say who I am,” answered Corrie, pitifully, “I ’ll promise anything. Oh, Miss Maria, I won’t harm you or Mrs. Pinchin, no matter what you ’ve done.”

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“Come!” growled Mr. Biggamore, wrathfully; “is this girl Mrs. Pinchin’s daughter, or ——”

“Lies,” answered Miss Maria, grinning outrageously, but without mirth.

“— or Stanwood Geikie’s?” exploded Mr. Biggamore.

“Lies — all lies,” answered Miss Maria, and fanned herself nervously with her bundle of papers. “Everything was lies. I have n’t drawn a truthful breath for nearly fifteen years. I ’ve lied to her and I ’ve lied to you and I ’ve lied to the world. I ’ve lied to God so that I have n’t dared to stick my nose inside a church from the time I first began to lie.” She stopped and caught her breath, and then went on again until she was breathless. “Mrs. Pinchin was a lie. I was a lie. I turned my own poor little crippled baby into a lie. Now she ’s dead, in punishment of me, and even when they buried her alone, I had to lie and say she was n’t mine. Oh, in His name, what lies!” gasped Miss Maria, her mouth opening in a sob; and thus having finished the catalogue of her deceits, Miss Maria sat up, with the waterworks playing their accompaniment, and turned around to Corrie.

“You ’re Dorothy Tollabee,” she said; “Randolph Tollabee’s daughter.”

And so, for the first time, to the accompaniment of tears flying like rain on a hill, the story of the absurd and ridiculous cheat was told.

At the best, it had been only a clumsy farce, a kind

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of *scherzo* jingling in syncopated measure to the derisive jig-step of fate. From the beginning, the two women must have foreseen its disastrous outcome, Miss Maria, year after year, begging to have done with it, and half beside herself with terror and with shame; Mrs. Pinchin, grim and implacably determined, still hanging on and resolved in the face of discovery — indeed, even in the face of death! — to cling desperately to the booty and to surrender nothing till her last rampart was stormed.

For it was her greed, and only that, which had been at the bottom of it — greed and a rapacious avarice. Sipping, tasting, guzzling, gorging, and what not, she had sworn, in fact, that she would tempt jail before she would give up her comforts; and year by year, still clinging to them, she had so fattened herself in self-indulgence that the ego in her cosmos obscured everything else in sight. Pity and compassion were gone; in their place she felt only the hatred we breed against those we have injured; and centering every thought in herself, Mrs. Pinchin, in time, had developed the traits that, had she been a man, would have made her either a historical rascal, or, on the other hand, a multi-millionaire. Indeed, it had gone so far that Miss Maria was frightened by it, and it is a question, if Corrie had not found out for herself, whether she would not, in her fear of something worse, have come forward and confessed the secret.

But Miss Maria, even though owning up to the crime, was her sister's able protestant. "I don't say

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she was right — no, Judie was pretty cruel. But then she had an excuse. Randolph had told us he 'd see we had all the money we needed ; — that was after our mother died, his stepmother, you know — and he promised Judie, too, he 'd help her get on socially. Her head was always filled with ideas about getting up in the world and giving grand parties and becoming a great lady. Yes! — and oh! can't you see what it 's come to now? It was that fever of hers to shine that brought us to the first step in our down-fall. Judie said she 'd have to know French, if she was going to get on with the *best people!*" The words came forth from between her teeth, uttered savagely and with an explosive vehemence. " The best people! Faugh! She 'd let them walk over her, if she could only get near enough to them — and they 'd trample on her, too, I think! But, anyway, Judie had to learn French, so she hired that young girl, Leonie Giraud — your mother, you understand," said Miss Maria, without looking at Corrie, and still staring at the floor. " And about that time, too," she continued, gritting her teeth, " Randolph brought Stanwood Geikie to our home."

The papers in her hand crumpled together, at this stage, with the force of Miss Maria's convulsive grip on them. " Yes — he brought that man there, and Judie set her cap at him."

" Eh? " exclaimed Mr. Biggamore, astonished.

" Oh, yes — and so did I, for that matter," droned Miss Maria, listlessly.

For so, indeed, it had been. Stanwood Geikie had

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seen the interest the two women evinced in him, and forthwith he had set out to profit by it. Tollabee was in frail health; he might not live long; and Stanwood Geikie had already been told by him that in event of his death, his money would go to his step-sisters. It is true, of course, that Tollabee had always regretted his father's second marriage; but the step-mother had been kind to him; he had grown up amiably with the girls, and while they were much older than he, the gentle, affectionate, shy, and generous man had come in time to be fond of them.

It was at this time that vague whispers against Stanwood Geikie had begun to spread. His name among women was known; his fortune had been squandered in ways by which no gentleman may spend his money and still remain gentle; and though he was grudgingly tolerated at his clubs, there were many other doors in New York already closed against him. So in Randolph Tollabee's sisters, the calculating Mr. Geikie, then well on toward forty, had seen a way to recoup himself, to get a little ready money in hand, and perhaps once more to set himself on his feet. In so many words, he decided he would marry one of the two — which one, it did n't matter in the least.

“I was a good looking girl then — Oh, you need n't stare!” said Miss Maria, darting a look at Mr. Biggamore, “and Judie, too. She was big and handsome; a fine, tall woman with snappy eyes. But Judie was getting on. She 'd had chances, only Judie got it into her head she 'd marry only a gentleman.

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Faugh! — and if a man of our own class asked her — there was more than one, too — Judie 'd only sneer at him. So, after a while, all the men we 'd known kept away, and then this Stanwood Geikie came — — Oh, well, you know what happened after that," added Miss Maria, listlessly.

"No, we don't!" corrected Mr. Biggamore, earnestly; "go on and tell us everything."

So Miss Maria, as directed, told everything.

Stanwood Geikie, it appeared, had been extremely catholic in his attentions, though, at the same time, equally secretive. Neither had suspected his doings with the other; and to Judie, as it turned out, he had made his first declaration. But Judie, as one learned, had been a bit of a coquette. She had been immensely pleased by the man's interest in her; yet so far from accepting him outright, she 'd thought it part of a fine lady to keep him dangling awhile. Stanwood Geikie, however, was in no mood to play the mouse to Judie's tabbikins; for though Judie's step-brother had not yet learned of the gentleman's queer repute in other quarters, there was every reason to believe he would soon enough, and the matter argued haste. So in a silent but boiling passion at Judie the flirt, the impatient lover hurriedly transferred all his attentions to the other sister, Miss Margaret, whose full, given name, by the way, was Margaret Maria.

It was a fine, enterprising little comedy; for, furthermore, while these three were prosecuting their own involved love affairs, Randolph Tollabee,

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in a quieter, more simple way, was carrying on his own. "One day," narrated Miss Maria, dully, without emotion, "our step-brother came home and told us he was engaged to the French girl. Judie, she nearly fainted."

For Judie, it appeared, had even then been self-centered enough to see at a flash what effect her step-brother's marriage would have on her future prospects. Still, she managed to hide her rage and disappointment; and when the young French girl came again, Judie glided up to her and with a face like the mask of death managed to control herself far enough to plant a Judas-kiss on the girl's cheek.

Had Stanwood Geikie learned at once of the impending marriage, it is doubtful whether the subsequent events would have taken place. For the sisters, through a subtle instinct of the man's real nature, concealed the announcement from him, each one secretly laying her plans. Judie, knowing now she had gone too far, tried furiously to repair the damage; the deferred yes was volunteered offhand; but Mr. Geikie, not seeing a way to clear himself from the other entanglement, or willing to take no risks, when he had the matter fully in hand, coolly replied that he had made other arrangements, and so left Judie to her reflections.

It was about this time, too, that Phil's father, Morton Geikie, had given to his brother Stanwood another chance. He, that is, Morton Geikie, was associated in a bond concern with both Tollabee and Mr. Biggamore; and for the first time since the

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squandering of his fortune Stanwood Geikie began earning a little money in other ways than by his wits. But so far from appreciating his brother's kindness, the man secretly raged at getting nothing better than a clerkship, and having his hands near to so much ready cash, he discreetly availed himself of the opportunity.

Thereafter events hurried swiftly. Rumors were heard about Stanwood Geikie's name among women. Randolph Tollabee's door was closed against him, the bond concern began to wake up, and the stock market, after having gone from bad to worse, broke uncharitably, and wiped out not only all of Stanwood Geikie's speculations, but pricked the bubble of his expectations too.

Therefore, the marriage! The secretive Miss Maria was led secretly to a secret place, and there, as she was made to believe, she became the wife of our gentlemanly adventurer, a fact — or a theory, as the case may be — which, the gentleman was careful to impress on her at the time, must remain a secret for the present.

There were two reasons why he went through the form — for it was, at least, a form — of marriage. One was the hope of falling heir to the Tollabee money, should Tollabee die; the other, and the more imperative one now, was that if the embezzlement were discovered and the blame put on the guilty person, Tollabee would be unlikely to proceed against him when he found him to be his brother-in-law.

But the man had not yet come to the last ditch.

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Therefore the marriage had been secret. If the thief was not discovered, and if Tollabee left no money to his sisters, the ingenious Mr. Geikie would be free to prosecute his efforts elsewhere; he could deny the marriage, and Miss Maria, having been bamboozled into allowing the knot to be tied by an alderman, whose name she had n't heard, and who she was not in the least certain was even the alderman as he was represented to be, — Miss Maria, having been cheated so, might go and whistle for her pains.

Very thoughtful! And very ingenious, too! How clearly our handsome picaroon looked ahead into the future may also be understood from the following sequence of events.

Randolph Tollabee walked to the altar with his blushing little French language teacher; and the modest though flourishing bond concern awoke to the fact that its assets had been wiped out by a theft.

But, as we already know, the man had so arranged matters beforehand that the guilt fell on someone else, and that someone was his brother. There was no prosecution; Stanwood Geikie escaped scot free; and Randolph Tollabee having arranged to leave his money elsewhere, Mr. Geikie cheerfully disavowed the marriage, though it was at a time when Miss Maria had every reason to show her certificate to the world.

It was curious to view her apathy when she came to this part of her tale. Long years of deceit and suffering had calloused Miss Maria's mind, and she

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told it all with an impersonal frankness that was very close to the grotesque. "Judie guessed it first," she said casually, with a little sigh, "and was going to turn me out of doors."

But Judie had n't, after all. It appeared that Judie, after raging a while and saying all her social ambitions would be ruined — social ambitions, mind you! — Judie had stopped long enough to ask who was the author of her sister's downfall. Thereupon Miss Maria, filled with shame and anguish, had declined to tell.

More raging, after that. More high words and thunderbolts from the black, snappy eyes. Then Judie, with her usual decision of character, had sat down to think it out. The upshot was that she and Miss Maria exiled themselves in a quiet country town on Long Island; and there, under an assumed name, the unhappy woman remained, threatened with brain fever, until the crippled child came into the world.

"I was called Mrs. Pinchin," added Miss Maria, weariedly.

"Hey?" exclaimed Mr. Biggamore, gaping.

"Oh, yes; Judie gave it to me. She just made it up. Later she took the name for herself."

And so the child came into the world, a poor, shapeless, misborn little cripple; and the deluded mother, her shame concealed for a time, went back to the city and took up the burden of her ruined existence.

"Judie said I'd have to leave the baby — she

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was n't going to take any chances. So we came home together, and Judie gave a party."

"A *what?* " burst out Mr. Biggamore.

"Don't interrupt me so. It's all I can do anyway to keep this business in mind." Miss Maria licked her lips as she blinked at him. "I tell you, Judie gave a party. She always did when she met any new people she thought could help her. All these were new people — about a dozen or so — and she hardly knew their names. I don't know where she picked them up — she was always doing it — and when I dragged myself into the parlor, there was Stanwood Geikie."

"But, good Heavens!" ex postulated Mr. Biggamore, puffing up his cheeks. "Why — !"

"You must keep still, sir. I'm giving you the facts. Judie 'd met him again somewhere — in the street, I guess — and as I 'd refused to tell her about him, she still did n't know who was my baby's father. So, of course he saw I was holding my tongue, and Judie, who still had hopes, asked him to the house."

"But Tollabee had kicked him out!" cried Mr. Biggamore, in his amazement, unable to hold his tongue. "How did she dare?"

"Oh, I know. But Randolph was in Europe, and she thought he would n't find out. Anyway she 'd asked Stanwood Geikie, and he 'd come, fast enough. I nearly fainted. I could see him grin at me out of the corner of his eyes, and all that evening — I nearly died, too — all the evening, I sat in a corner, and when anyone tried to talk to me I just stared

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at them. After a while, they all went to supper. Judie always gave people a lot to eat. Well, they went out to supper — all except us two. So that was my chance, I thought, and I got down on my knees to him, and — ”

“ On your knees! — to that scoundrel? ”

Miss Maria nodded carelessly. “ Yes, and I begged and begged him, and he only laughed at me. Then I told him if he would n’t, I ’d never speak to him again. Well, he would n’t,” said Miss Maria, sighing; “ and I never have.”

“ God A’mighty! ” interjected Mr. Biggamore, his eyes staring; and Corrie, leaving her seat, went and put an arm around the sobbing, wretched creature. “ Poor, poor Aunt Margaret,” she murmured, with a generous tact, rather unusual in the face of the circumstances; and Miss Maria drove back her tears, and looked up at her with eyes shining gratefully like a dog’s.

“ But, of course, I *could n’t*, ” added Miss Maria, striving to make clear a fact that was already clear; “ no — not after the way he ’d acted. And I never did — not a single word from that night right up to now.”

However, that was n’t all. A few weeks passed, Miss Maria, in the meanwhile, eating out her heart with anguish at the thought of the crippled child, now farmed out among strangers; and then one night, she went into the hall and found Judie Tollabee with her hat on, and a bag in her hand. It was pretty late at night, too.

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“Where are you going?” Miss Maria had asked, astonished.

Judie put down her bag. “I’m going out.” Then she paused and looked at her sister. “Margaret, he made me promise I would n’t tell anyone. He was particular about you, besides. But I’m going to tell. I can’t keep the secret, I’m so happy. I can’t keep it any longer. I’m going to be married.”

Miss Maria had fairly screamed at her:—“Tell me his name!”

It was as she thought. Judie had told, and then Miss Maria, raving hysterically, had thrown herself on her knees. “You can’t! He’s mine already! He’s my child’s father! He’s the one! I tell you he’s married to me!”

It appears that Judie had not taken the news kindly. She burst into a terrible wrath, raging at her sister for having deceived her, furious at having been played with and tricked, frenzied at the ruining of her dreams, since she’d hoped to find in the marriage— which, no doubt, would have turned out no bit different than her sister’s — the path to social eminence. But after another interval of high strikes, Judie Tollabee had suddenly put a hand to her throat, gagged once, and then pitched over on her face in a fit.

“That’s what made her lame,” explained Miss Maria, apathetically. “She got a terrible limp from it.”

And in addition to the limp, Judie Tollabee got a

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warning. She was told to go slow or the next shock might prove fatal. There must be no more high living — the sipping, tasting, guzzling, gorging, and what not, that, even then, were the chief elements in Judie's greedy being. No more rages, either, or Judie had better look out. No more antics of any kind, unless she wished to pay the penalty. So after carefully writing a perfectly calm letter, in which she told her lover she was indisposed and could n't oblige him with another mock marriage, and adding afterward, in the same placid, unemotional way, that she thought him a sharper, a cheat and a thief — after this perfectly calm little indulgence, Judie settled down to a life that was about as pleasant to her and as full of joy and comfort and delight as a residence in Greenwood Cemetery. Thus, for two years Judie eked out a morose and sullen existence, and then Randolph Tollabee's wife died and the widower became seriously ill and Judie began to take a new interest in affairs.

“She said things were looking brighter,” Miss Maria droned, exactly expressing it.

But not for long, it turned out. Tollabee wrote that he was coming home to live with them, and then on top of this, while Judie and her sister were making ready, there came another letter, saying he had changed his mind. In fact, Tollabee washed his hands clear of his sister; someone had told him how Judie, in defiance of his orders, had asked Stanwood Geikie to her home, and, furthermore, a whisper had reached Tollabee of her evident intention to marry

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the man. There was not even the slightest doubt he was outraged, and so outraged that he took no pains to conceal it.

"I thought Judie 'd have another fit," said Miss Maria, reminiscently; "but she did n't. She calmed down, after a while, and then she began to think. Yes — and when Judie begins to think, I begin to get scared," observed Miss Maria, reflectively; "and that was one of the times, too, when I had every reason to be."

For Miss Maria, after the first anguish over her child, now deserted among strangers, had found time to consider her own position. Though innocent, and tricked into her plight by a false marriage, she knew, nevertheless, that if anything were found out about it, she would be ruined to a certainty. So when Judie began to think, Maria began to get frightened.

"She said she guessed she 'd have to tell him," repeated Miss Maria, dully; "and so I got down on my knees again."

It was just another appeal; Miss Maria appeared to have gone down on her knees a great many times in her woe-begone existence.

"You see, Judie thought it 'd be the only way to explain things. She was going to tell Randolph what Stanwood Geikie had done to me, and then say she 'd brought him to the house, only to make him acknowledge his marriage. I begged her to think of my poor, little crippled child and what would happen to it, if I was turned into the street. You

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see, I did n't know what Randolph would do to me. He was supporting me — giving Judie and me the money we lived on; and he was so angry at what Judie 'd done, he was threatening to cut it off. Then I 'd gone away, too, with Stanwood Geikie, after he 'd been ordered out of the house, and there was no telling what Randolph might do; and the little money that Randolph's father had left my mother was n't enough to keep us. So I begged Judie to think of my baby, and Judie said there was n't any use to — not when she was so bothered about her own allowance — *umph!*" recited Miss Maria, with a troubled sniff.

"But I kept on begging. I told her, besides, that he 'd know she was only lying — I mean that part, you know, about getting Stanwood Geikie to the house and making him marry me. I showed her how he must suspect already that Judie had wanted to marry him herself; and when I got that far, Judie sat back and began to bite her lip. 'Why, I had n't thought of that,' she said. 'Yes, I guess I won't tell him yet, about you and your doings.' So I got up from my knees, and Judie wrote a long letter, begging Randolph's forgiveness. She said she 'd given a big party, and that Stanwood Geikie had come without an invitation; but I don't think Judie did it very cleverly. No, I guess not. Anyway, Judie pretty nearly had another stroke when she got his answer.

"He was even more angry than before. I guess he knew she was lying. He wrote that if the party

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was to blame, Judie should give no more parties. They were only extravagant, and there was no reason why he should deny himself and his little girl to pay for Judie's amusements. So our allowance was reduced, so that we had just enough to live on comfortably.

"I did n't care. It was enough to keep me and my baby; and then I knew he 'd lost a lot of money when the bond concern failed. Stanwood Geikie, I guess, had pretty nearly cleaned them out; and though Randolph suspected him of the theft, that man had fixed up the books so they 'd think his brother was guilty, too."

"Yes, the scoundrel!" muttered Mr Biggamore.

Miss Maria turned around to Corrie. "You 'll be patient, won't you?" she asked in a tired voice. "I have to tell this the way it happened, or I won't be able to remember it. My head 's just going round and round as it is." She paused, and studied the carpet a moment.

"Judie began to hate you right there," said Miss Maria, aimlessly. "She said you and your mother had done her out of what was rightfully hers — Randolph's money, you know — and she 'd like to throttle you. She nearly had another fit when she read out to me what he said about refusing to deny his little girl — you, Corrie — to pay for Judie's amusements. Oh, she was just hopping. But, by and by, she turned around and got furious at me, too, for not letting her write Randolph about me and my baby. She said she was going to do it now; and so

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I got down on my knees again. But it did n't do any good," added Miss Maria, and began to fan herself with her papers.

"I guess Judie was so upset she really did n't know what she was doing. She told everything, and then gave her excuse that she'd only had the man here to try and make him marry me. Afterwards, she apologized for having made such a mistake; it was only her kind-heartedness that had kept her from turning me out of doors after the way I'd brought shame on them all. I told Judie she ought not to write that, but she said for me to mind my own business; and if I'd had my baby with me then, I don't think we'd have bothered Judie any more — or anyone else," said Miss Maria, reflecting.

"Good Lord! — oh, come, come!" protested Mr. Biggamore; "you must n't talk like that."

"No, it's too late now, anyway," answered Miss Maria, feebly; "besides, I have to take care of Judie."

But what happened was this: Judie had sent the second letter, and Tollabee had answered it, expressing profound regret for poor Miss Maria and her child, and contempt for a sister who could talk of turning the wretched woman into the street.

"Anyway, Randolph said that as I was the only one who had n't wilfully lied to him, he'd stand by me. I was to have enough to take care of me and the baby, but Judie'd have to look out for herself. He said he had you to think of besides, Corrie; so he cut off her allowance altogether — yes, he did!"

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affirmed Miss Maria, earnestly; "and Judie took on so, it nearly broke my heart.

" You see," continued Miss Maria, after a reflective pause, "she thought she 'd have to find some work to support her — a place in a store, or companion to a lady — like she 'd read about; or maybe she 'd get to be a dressmaker. But Judie was too lame to stand up in a shop, and she did n't know how to sew well enough to become a dressmaker, and when she thought of hiring out to wait on a lady, she 'd almost go into hysterics at the idea of being snubbed and ordered around and made to wait on someone. She said she 'd die first, and I nearly cried my eyes out over her, I was so sorry. I used to pray then — it was before I got afraid to show myself in a church — and so I prayed and prayed for Judie, and I think God heard my prayers. Anyway, Judie did n't have to take a place. Just as we were getting ready to move into a boarding-house, where Judie was going to stay until I found something to do, why I got a telegram that Randolph Tollabee was dying, and Judie nearly went out of her mind.

" I guess she did; anyway, she said my prayers had been answered."

CHAPTER XXIII

Relating how Randolph Tollabee died, and how his relatives promptly took charge of his child. — What became of the missing Geikie papers. — Judie's clever administration of the estate. — Margaret Tollabee's child, and why Mrs. Pinchin never learned cooking in jail. — Stanwood Geikie on the scene. — Blood money, and why being found out is sometimes the costliest sin of all. — Mrs. Pinchin's interest in Phil explained at last. — Miss Maria ends her tale.

MISS MARIA paused long enough to look wistfully at Corrie. "You're not dreadfully angry at me, are you? I wasn't always cruel and wicked, and I tried to be as kind as I dared. You won't be too mad at me, will you?"

Corrie shook her head hurriedly. "No; go on. I wish to hear about it." She leaned forward absorbedly, her fingers knitted together, her face quite pale.

"All right, then — so as you're not too angry at me," said Miss Maria, picking up the threads of her story.

There had come the message that Randolph Tollabee was dying; and Judie had said she was going to him. Miss Maria had tried to dissuade her, but the determined woman only declared further she was going to appeal to him on his death-bed. She wished to find out whether he would n't leave her

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something; and in a perfect fury of haste, she made her sister pack a bag and rush for a train. Her hands, in fancy, were already on the dying man's money; it is not improbable that, even at this early stage, she had conceived the cheat she later put into effect; and through the night's journey, she sat up in the sleeping car, her hat on and chafing at every delay. Long before they arrived at the little town in the spruce woods, she was moving about excitedly, and urging Maria to get ready; and when they got out, eventually, the first question she asked, was: "He ain't dead yet, is he?"

"No, ma'am, but they don't cal'late he 'll live the day aout," answered the driver of the waiting buckboard.

Indeed, Randolph Tollabee lay in the final coma when they reached the little cottage.

"I plumb gave out, and began to cry," sniffed Miss Maria, beginning to shed a few more tears in remembrance. "But you could n't blame me. He 'd always been kind to me, and I just had to cry. Judie did n't though; so I saw she had n't forgiven him. At least, that was what I thought about it. She took off her bonnet, and began poking around just as soon as she 'd taken one look at him; and I wondered what had got into Judie."

For in a short hour Randolph Tollabee was dead; and then Judie had gone to work in earnest. Miss Maria, weeping at the bedside, had heard her opening and closing drawers, and rummaging among

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papers; and presently she came in, crying gleefully: "I've found them!"

"But see here!" protested Mr. Biggamore, outraged, "wasn't there anyone else in the house?"

"Not then," answered Miss Maria, after a moment's thought; "the doctor had gone away, and there were only two servants — a woman from the village, who did the cooking and housework, and Corrie's nurse. The nurse was an English girl that he'd brought over from the other side. Judie paid her passage home, a few days later, and gave her two months' wages beside. She thought Judie was mighty nice and kind."

"Humph! I have no doubt!" snorted Mr. Biggamore. "But what was it that your precious sister found?"

Miss Maria looked at him sharply. "You mustn't talk like that about Judie," she retorted vexedly; "or I won't tell you any more."

"You were going to tell me what she'd found," suggested Mr. Biggamore, mildly.

"Papers," answered Miss Maria, going on. "Judie sent the house girl away on an errand, and then she went out into the garden where you, Corrie, and your nurse were, and she sent the nurse away on another message. You were left playing alone in the garden, Corrie, and Judie found the papers."

"Tollabee's will, I suppose," growled Mr. Biggamore under his breath; "I imagine there was one."

"There were two," corrected Miss Maria, "or,

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at least, one and the part of another one. He 'd tried to rewrite the old will, but had n't strength enough. It left an allowance to Judie and me — the same allowance he 'd made us before he took Judie's away. In the second will, he 'd cut her out altogether; and Judie burned that one before I could stop her. The other, she kept."

"Where is it now?" demanded Mr. Biggamore.

"He stole it — Stanwood Geikie, you know — along with a lot of other Tollabee papers."

"But I don't know," contradicted Mr. Biggamore, excitedly; so Corrie broke in, and hurriedly told what had happened, the theft that had resulted in Mrs. Pinchin's apoplectic stroke.

"Good Heavens! this has got me beaten!" he exclaimed, throwing up both hands. "Go on, Miss Tollabee; I 'll keep quiet now."

So Judie had cried, "I 've found them!" and after showing the two documents to Miss Maria she had tossed one into the blazing grate.

"I got good and scared then," continued Miss Maria. "I was afraid she 'd get into trouble, so I looked around while she was outside, and I found a lot of other papers. I have them here in my hands."

Miss Maria leaned over and began untying the tape around the package, and after running through the papers, she looked up at Mr. Biggamore.

"You remember the papers your brother-in-law came after? — Morton Geikie, I mean. Judie was scared almost to death. Well, she told the truth

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when she said she hadn't seen them, because she had n't. I stole them, and she never knew where they were until I told her a few days ago — last Sunday, I guess it was. I knew what they were as soon as Morton Geikie asked for them, and then I took a look. They would have sent Stanwood Geikie to jail, if I had given them up. You can have them now."

Mr. Biggamore fairly snatched the papers from her hands, bobbing his head still more energetically, as he opened first one and then the other; and Corrie gazed at Miss Maria piteously.

"Oh, Miss Maria — Aunt Margaret! How could you keep them? Don't you know what happened to Phil's father?"

"Yes, I know; and I guess I was crazy. I thought maybe I could use them sometime to make Stanwood Geikie marry me. Anyway, I did n't want to send him to jail, and — and — oh, well, I loved him. I wanted him to come back to me."

Mr. Biggamore stared at her open-mouthed over the top of his glasses. "You mean to say that you 'd have married that blackguard, after all?"

"Oh, yes — anyhow up till this morning, when I found out he 'd tried to play his tricks on Corrie. I used to remember him as he was when I first knew him — and I carried his picture, too — just as he was, you know, when I 'd first met him, and he was trying to be nice and sweet and gentlemanly. But when I heard about his trying to marry Corrie here for her fortune — he 'd seen the game was up, I sup-

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pose, and would really have married you for your money and to keep out of trouble. Anyway, when I heard about it, something went *snap!* in my heart, and I only hated him. But I did love him for years, all the same."

"Live and learn!" muttered Mr. Biggamore, sententiously, and bit his lip.

So Judie had made her plans. She decided to take Corrie home to New York with her; for it appeared then to have been her intention to probate the undestroyed will, and, as executrix, to keep control of the money. The document, written before Tollabee had discerned his step-sister's real character, named her and Miss Maria as guardians in event of his death; and he had tried too late to write another. Thus, on the face of it, the field was clear; and after disposing of Morton Geikie, who had come for his papers, and seeing Randolph Tollabee into his grave, Judie, her sister, and Corrie went back to the city, and there Judie wasted no time.

"She did n't tell me a word what she meant to do," said Miss Maria, drearily. "The day after we came home, she went away early in the morning, and when she walked in at night, she had my baby in her arms. She 'd been all the way out there on Long Island to get it. I nearly died of joy, and I threw my arms around her, and told her how good she was to me. But Judie told me to shut up; she was n't going to let me live with my little girl, so that everyone would find out about it. She only meant to have it nearer home. Then, the next day, she went out

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again early, and I did n't see her till night. But I did n't think about that. I had my baby, and I tried all day to make it smile, and I could n't, and then part of the day I tried to get its arms and legs straight, and I could n't do that, either. So when Judie came in, I was crying. 'Stop your bawling,' she said to me; 'we 're going to move.' "

And move they did; for Judie's scheme was sprouting out. They moved, and the crippled child was left behind with an attendant, who was told that it was Randolph Tollabee's child. Miss Maria had gone down on her knees again on hearing this deceit, but to no avail. "I 'll tell on you," she had threatened finally, and Judie had looked at her with a flaming face.

"Do it, if you dare!" she threatened in turn. "That money — or a part of it, anyway, belongs to me. I 'm not going to let any brat stand in my way. I 've offered the will for probate, and if you say anything about the one I burned, everyone shall know about that child of yours and your shame. Now go ahead and tell, if you like."

Miss Maria took off her spectacles, which had grown blurred during the recital, and blinked while she wiped them with the edge of her skirt. "I did n't go down on my knees any more," she murmured; "I just kept on saying 'I 'll tell! I 'll tell! I 'll tell!'"

"I 'm going to keep what 's my own," Judie had responded; "anyhow, I 'm going to keep it till I die. I don't care what happens to it then. But

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if you tell on me now, I 'll go to jail. They 'll arrest me for burning up the other will, and then where 'll you be? "

" It 's stealing! " Miss Maria had cried.

" No, it ain't, " her sister had answered, with a ready retort; " the money 's rightfully mine. Randolph Tollabee promised to leave it to me, and if it had n't been for that French teacher, and now this brat, I 'd have had it. Besides, what can this child do with all that much money, anyway? "

But Miss Maria had still protested it was stealing. If Judie was not meaning to steal all of it, rather than a part only, why had she substituted one child for another. Precisely! And Judie had a ready answer for that, too. Corrie might not die, and if she were allowed to remain known as the heir, there would be a lot of trouble when the time came to turn over her fortune to her.

Then Miss Maria had suddenly grown cold. " But my baby — my little girl whom you 've put in her place! " she had wept. " She can't live very long. What will you do with all the money when she dies? "

Precisely! — and Judie's eyes had glittered. Judie had already made plans for what she 'd do with it.

" Now let 's have an end to this foolishness, " she had growled roughly. " Here 's your choice: We 'll move where we 're not known, and your child 'll remain here. She 'll be known as Dorothy Tollabee, and I 'll be known as Mrs. Pinchin. That 's so we 'll be safe, if anyone recognizes us. If they do, and

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things come to the worst, I 'll say Corrie 's my child, and that Stanwood Geikie 's her father. That ought to satisfy you — yes, after the way you 've howled around about your virtue, Miss Margaret Maria Tollabee. We 'll keep your child here in the Tenth Street house, and we 'll move over to Bend Street, where we 're not known, and where there 's a little house belonging to the estate. We can keep quiet, for a while, then I 'm going to move uptown where I can begin all over again. There 's no one but trash anyway, down here, that comes to my parties, and I intend to have a good time. Is it a go?"

" It 's stealing!" wailed Miss Maria, still obsessed by conscience. " I won 't do it."

" All right then," retorted Judie, grimly; " I suppose I 'll have to go to jail. I 've taken oath at the Surrogate 's office, and now I 'm in for it. You 'll be glad when you see me in prison weaving baskets and pounding oakum and washing dishes for the convicts — cooking for them, too, I should n't wonder. Do you want me to learn cooking in jail? "

So rather than see her sister cooking for the convicts, Miss Maria had given in. She said she 'd submit, but in the same breath, she swore to Judie that she 'd never accept a cent of the ill-gotten booty, and that when Corrie came of age, she would tell.

" Do as you please about that," answered Judie, now newly christened as Mrs. Pinchin. " By the time she comes of age, I 'll have had my fun, and

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can die, perhaps. Or maybe I won't mind going to jail after I've enjoyed myself."

So the farce had been carried out: the servants were dismissed, and new ones engaged; the new house was opened, and the old one left as it was, tenanted only by that substituted child and its attendants. In the neighborhood, the Tollabees were said to have gone into the country; and when the first year passed by safely, Mrs. Pinchin chuckled. She chuckled still more at the second; and half-way through the third year she became positively hilarious.

"Then the doorbell rang one day," said Miss Maria, simply; "and when I went down into the parlor, there was Stanwood Geikie. He threw back his head when he saw me, and laughed and laughed, and I gave him one look, and then went upstairs and told Judie."

For it had been as Miss Maria had suspected, Stanwood Geikie had smelled out the fraud, and had come to demand his share.

An hour later, Judie lurched back up the stairs, her face like a death mask. She was wheezing and gasping and her form trembled as if with a palsy. "I've fixed him," she guttered, and fought for breath. "He knows all about it — the fiend! — but I've fixed him. He's to have a third of my income regularly, or he'll go and tell. I've promised him."

"Every year, since then," said Miss Maria, without emotion, "he's sucked the blood money out of

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us. Once or twice, in years when he 'd lost in Wall Street, he made Judie give him more than half. It got so, Mr. Biggamore, that I begged her to run away with me and my baby, and then write to you what had happened. But Judie would n't. She said she could n't give up her comforts. I think she 'd have rather died."

But after this shock came a worse one. The Geikies and Mr. Biggamore moved into the house behind the little gentleman's present residence. "One of our servants told me, Mr. Biggamore," said Miss Maria, coming to this. "The servant told me who was moving in, and I nearly fainted. I 'd just been to see my little girl, so I rushed upstairs to tell Judie. But Judie 'd found out already, and was raging. She knew your brother-in-law had recognized us, because she heard your nephew telling Corrie. For weeks afterward, we wondered why nothing was done about it. Why! every time the doorbell rang, Judie and I just died of fright! But nothing happened, and we never knew why."

"I can explain that," said Mr. Biggamore, soberly; "my brother never told anyone but the boy. He and Phil were alone in the house; my sister and I had n't finished packing up at our old home. That same night you ran away from Bend Street, Morton Geikie killed himself. He could n't stand the shame any longer of what his brother's rascality had cost him."

But after the women and the child had fled to another part of the city, Stanwood Geikie had taken

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the abandoned house. He insisted on Mrs. Pinchin giving it to him, but would offer no explanation other than that he wished it. The reason they learned later; he had heard from Mrs. Pinchin of the probable existence of those papers Morton Geikie had demanded, and the thought of them filled his soul with uneasiness. He decided that Mr. Biggamore and Mrs. Geikie were holding them back till they got a good chance to strike; or they were waiting until he had enough money to make it worth while to produce them. At the time, the profits from his blackmail were large; he had increased it by speculation, and with brighter fortune dawning, Stanwood Geikie hoped to replace himself in the world. But with the damning evidence of those papers still in existence, there was no telling when the sword might fall; and Stanwood Geikie lived many uneasy moments at the thought of what might happen.

"That's what smashed us up," said Miss Maria, frankly. "If it had n't been for his trying to work on your nephew, Mr. Biggamore, we'd never have been found out."

Mr. Biggamore looked at her doubtfully. "How do you mean, madam? I don't think I follow you."

"Why," explained Miss Maria, "he tried to get at Phil. He told Judie a long while after, that he'd tried to worm himself into the boy's good graces and had failed. I guess he offered him money — yes, I thought so. His idea was to corrupt Phil with

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money and presents, so that he 'd steal the papers and bring them to him."

"Ah, yes! I understand! the scoundrel!" muttered Mr. Biggamore; and Corrie, too, remembered the episode of the dollar that had been hurled in Uncle Stanwood's face.

"After that, we never had a moment's peace," said Miss Maria. "One thing after another happened. Corrie found the Tollabee books in the garret. Then she began to insist on being told who she was; and the more Judie told stories, the worse it got. I was getting down on my knees regularly now," Miss Maria went on, listlessly; "but Judie would n't give up her comforts. She kept at it, and even then she might have fooled you, Corrie, if Stanwood Geikie had n't made Judie herself get after Phil."

"What 's that?" demanded Mr. Biggamore, again.

Miss Maria looked at him blankly, and then seemed to understand.

"Oh! you don't know about it? Why, he had a scheme for Judie to hire Phil as an architect, and when she got him interested, she was to give him an office with a safe in it. He 'd be expected to keep his valuable papers in it, and Stanwood Geikie kind of hoped the ones he wanted would be among them. Then some night he would go get them."

"Oho!" exclaimed Mr. Biggamore, remembering Mrs. Pinchin's offer to Phil of an office with a safe in it. "That makes it all clear now. Well go on, if you please."

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Judie, as Miss Maria clearly showed, had n't taken kindly to the idea. She had protested from the start that it was sheer idiocy. It was worse than that, when he persisted coming to her house to see how matters were getting along.

“ That first Sunday night a week ago, she nearly had a stroke, she was so frightened. She found out you were trying to locate the house where we 'd lived, Corrie. That young man let it out unconsciously. So we knew you 'd been stirred up, and Judie thought he 'd told you.”

It came out further, that this had been a memorable evening in more than one respect; a crucial turning point in the fortunes of all concerned. For in despite the fact that Miss Maria had learned her child was in critical health, Mrs. Pinchin had not only gone on with her party, but had insisted on Miss Maria's presence. There was only one explanation of it: Mrs. Pinchin even then was frightened, too afraid to be left alone.

“ Why! she was so frightened she cried,” volunteered Miss Maria; “ and the next morning she made me stay and watch you. She went down to see how my baby was getting on,”— Miss Maria's baby must have been nearly twenty, then — “ and afterwards she walked all the way to Stanwood Geikie's to tell him she was n't going to take the risk for him, or anyone else, no matter what he did to her. It was the first time she 'd ever been there since we ran away from that house, and she was frightened out of her senses.”

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"Yes, I know," said Corrie, quietly; "I saw her."

Miss Maria stared vaguely, a moment, but made no comment. "There ain't but a little more now," she went on. "He made her keep at it; your advertisement appeared, Mr. Biggamore; and then I knew it was all over. But Judie still would n't give in. She said she was afraid to, and the way she told stories to poor Corrie here just made me heartsick. Then Stanwood Geikie came, and Judie said to him: 'We 're all going to jail, I guess.' She told me afterward he grinned at her, and said he did n't know what she meant. 'You 'll go to jail, perhaps, Judie, but they can't do anything to *me*.' But I guess he was pretty uneasy just the same, because the morning after I 'd seen you, Mr. Biggamore, he came up here and forced his way into Judie's room. But when Judie said again, we were all going to jail, he still laughed, and said it was none of his concern where she went. She could go to Jericho, if she chose, only he thought she was making a mountain out of a molehill. He was always saying that."

"Yes; and I heard him say it," said Corrie, remembering.

"Hmph!" sniffed Miss Maria, savagely; "but he 'd forgotten all about *me*! If there was any jail opening for us, I made up my mind he 'd get a look into it, too. So on Sunday morning — last Sunday, you know — I told Judie about the papers I 'd stolen years ago. They were the ones I 've just

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given you, Mr. Biggamore. 'Oh, my God!' screamed Judie, clutching me by the arm: 'and you've had them all this time, and let that man bleed me to the last drop of blood? Give them to me!' But I would n't. I said I had them, and I was going to keep them till the time came. 'But you've got them — you're sure?' asked Judie, and it's a wonder she did n't get her stroke then. 'If you've got them, I can get rid of that cheat and blackmailer!' "

So armed with this weapon, Mrs. Pinchin had hurried away from the house in Tenth Street, leaving Miss Maria to watch beside her dying daughter. That night she had served warning on Stanwood Geikie that she would submit to his brutality no more; and had she not feared he would inform on her, she was enraged enough to have refused further payments of blackmail.

"I just knew, though," observed Miss Maria, thoughtfully; "that he'd do what he did — steal our papers, I mean. I knew he was after the ones I've given to you, Mr. Biggamore; but Judie was afraid he'd try to get his hands on the Tollabee papers. But he was after the ones you have now, Mr. Biggamore, when he broke into Judie's room; and I guess he just took the others because they were handy."

"Well, a lot of good they'll do him now," snapped Mr. Biggamore; "and if he ever shows his face in New York again, I'll know how to take care of him. But of course he won't hang around now," added

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the little gentleman, regretfully; "not when he knows the cat's out of the bag."

"No; I guess he'll skip," observed Miss Maria, solemnly. "Well, as I was saying, Stanwood Geikie broke into Judie's room, and then Judie came home and had her shock. Now she's all paralyzed, and — and —"

Miss Maria drew in another long breath through her nose, and slowly took off her spectacles. She looked up at the ceiling while she wiped them on the fold of her dress, and then she sniffed again.

"Well, that's all," she said, and with a little gagging sob, buried her face in her hands.

CHAPTER XXIV

And last. — In which Mrs. Pinchin appeals. — Corrie's stolen childhood. — Phil Geikie declines to see Miss Dorothy Tollabee. — Mr. Biggamore's embarrassment at the tableau in the drawing-room. — How Corrie was willing at last. — The foreword before FINIS. — Miss Maria finds herself to be a wife. — Stanwood Geikie's confession and flight. — The scene in the street car. — Corrie's tender-hearted sympathy. — FINIS.

SO now the story was told, the grotesque and shameful farce laid bare; and when Miss Maria came to the end of her tale, and covered her face with her hands, Corrie and Mr. Biggamore sat looking at her silently. In the little gentleman's face was a curious expression; he sucked in his lip dubiously, and fell to tugging energetically at his forelock.

“Madam,” he said reflectively, “I believe you’ve been punished enough already, — well, upon my soul, I believe I’m sorry for you!”

Miss Maria recovered herself far enough to look up at him wryly. “I’m not asking your pity,” she retorted; “you can keep it till it’s wanted.”

But this gleam of spirit was only a flying spark; it burned itself away quickly; and Miss Maria turned toward the girl. “What are you going to do to us, Corrie? — that’s really your name, too. Your father called you Dorrie, for Dorothy, and you could n’t get it any nearer than Corrie. I would n’t let Judie

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change it — I thought it 'd be a shame." Miss Maria wiped her eyes again. "What are you going to do to us, Corrie? I know you 've promised, but —— "

Corrie sadly shook her head. "Nothing, Miss Maria. I would have done nothing, even if I had n't given my promise."

"And you won't send Judie to prison? *There!* I told Judie you 'd be kind and soft-hearted like that, when you knew. Now you 're going to be nice and sweet to Judie, won't you? Just think how she 's suffered."

"Oh, good Lord!" exclaimed Mr. Biggamore, and flounced across the room.

Miss Maria, who was watching Corrie intently, gave no heed to the little gentleman's petulance. "You will be nice and kind, won't you, Corrie?"

But Corrie evaded the question. "Does Mrs. Pinchin know you 've told me?" she asked.

Miss Maria sighed regretfully. "I think she suspects. That 's why I wanted an hour to make up my mind. I told Judie I guessed we 'd better give in, and that anyway she could n't give any more parties or wear fine things or eat such a lot of good things any more. She 's got to take care of herself; and besides, how 'd she look walking around in jail with a cane? 'Why, you 'd look like a perfect fool, Judie!' I told her; and I should n't wonder but she thought so, too."

"I 'd like to see her," said Corrie, suddenly. "Won't you please go tell her I 'm coming?"

THE TABLEAU IN THE DRAWING-ROOM

Miss Maria got up slowly. "You won't be cross?" she pleaded; and Corrie shaking her head, Miss Maria glided away — dowdy, stoop-shouldered, more self-debased than ever; yet, with all that, almost noble in her devotion to the greedy, selfish woman who had wretchedly debauched such love. Presently Miss Maria returned and crooked her finger at Corrie; and the girl went up the stairs to that darkened room above.

The twisted, masklike face lay among the pillows, its closed eyes turned upward to the ceiling. At the noise of the door closing, Mrs. Pinchin breathed deeply, and a movement ran through her frame, outlined largely beneath the coverings, as if she strove to huddle down in the four-poster. Then her one eye opened furtively, and, as quickly, shut itself; Mrs. Pinchin breathed again deeply; and Corrie, standing by the bed, silently looked at her.

Mrs. Pinchin spoke:

"What are you going to do to me?" Miss Maria had said *us*. Whether Mrs. Pinchin thought herself the one conspirator, or whether she had no thought of others, who can say? "Are you going to get square?" she demanded grimly, perhaps defiantly. "I have n't stolen anything."

Corrie made no reply.

"No, I have n't," reassured Mrs. Pinchin. "You 've got more money now than there ever was." Corrie still was silent. "I have n't stolen anything from you, Corrie. No — no, I have n't." There she caught at her breath; a little whimper came breaking

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from her lips, and a tear, pendent on one thick lid, rolled across her leathery face. But it was a tear of self-pity rather than for any regret of what she had done to this girl. "I suppose I'm going to be turned out, and lose all I got. But I thought — I thought," she whimpered, her voice breaking, "I thought maybe you'd be a little kind to me, now that I made Maria tell you. Yes, I just had to make her do it. Are n't you going to forgive me? I have n't really stolen anything."

"Forgive you? No, I can never forgive you, Mrs. Pinchin."

The figure in the bed tried forcefully to raise itself. Then, after the futile effort, Mrs. Pinchin lay back among the pillows, and began to mutter thickly. "I did n't steal anything, I tell you. No, I did n't. I did n't steal a thing. You've got more than there ever was, I say."

Corrie threw out both her hands in a gesture of appealing wistful trouble. "Oh, Mrs. Pinchin!" she cried brokenly, "how can I forgive you when you've stolen away my childhood."

"Unh!" grunted the figure in the bed, and so Corrie left her.

Mr. Biggamore, who, during this interval, had been peering through the lace draperies of the drawing-room window, let fall an abrupt exclamation. "Confound him!" he cried wrathfully. "I'd like to know now what the young idiot's up to. *Hey!*" beckoning furiously through the glass, and then —

THE TABLEAU IN THE DRAWING-ROOM

“Oh, my dear young girl! I beg your pardon. Excuse me, just a moment.”

Mr. Biggamore hurried to the front door, and at the sight of him, Phil, who had stopped on the sidewalk opposite to moon up at the windows, scowled frightfully, and walked on. “Hey! you Phil there!” bawled the little gentleman; and Phil having turned, Mr. Biggamore violently signaled him to draw near.

“What do you want of me?” Phil demanded darkly.

“Nothing — except that you won’t make an ass of yourself,” retorted Mr. Biggamore. Then from his height on the front steps, he began to nod and grin and wink and to jerk his thumb over his shoulder in the most expressive, if inelegant way.

And after the little gentleman had prolonged this pantomime to unreasonable lengths, it seemed to dawn on Phil that he was requested to step inside.

“Yes, come on in!” chirped Mr. Biggamore. “She says she ’ll see you again.”

Phil, with a lowering brow, came up the steps. “Look here, Uncle Phil,” he growled savagely, “I don’t know what you ’ve told Corrie, but I wish you to know that it won’t do any good. You ’re wasting your breath trying to make her give me up. She won’t, and I ’ll tell you why: — Because I won’t let her!”

“Oh, Great Scott!” exclaimed Mr. Biggamore. “Why — oh, now!” He darted to the drawing-

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room door. "I'm choking — yes, I do believe — Corrie, where can I get a glass of water? Oh, to be sure. Oh, yes, in the dining room, of course!" And dashing away, Mr. Biggamore effaced himself tactfully, only stopping at the end of the hall to cry:

"You go in there, Phil. Miss Dorothy Tollabee wishes to see you!"

Phil, standing in the vestibule, glared after him. "I wish to see Corrie," he growled; "I don't care to see that other girl."

"Phil — oh, Phil!"

Then he had her in his arms, her cheek against his, and then —

But never mind what then. They were still standing there when Mr. Biggamore returned from the dining room. "Oh, excuse me!" murmured the little gentleman, stealing away; but they had not heard or seen him. "Why!" muttered Mr. Biggamore to himself, and blushed rosily as he said it; "I believe — now honestly I do — I believe he was kissing her, and she was letting him."

But the little gentleman was wrong in his painful surmise.

"Phil — dear, dear boy; you need n't look around for that other girl you did n't wish to see. There's only one Dorothy Tollabee here, and I am she, Phil. I am Dorothy Tollabee. Don't you understand? — and I love you so — love you — love you, Phil — and it's all right now. Have n't you anything to say to me, Phil, when I tell you I love you?"

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She took his dazed face between her hands, and looked up at him. "Don't you dare, Phil? — Well, I do!"

Then he awoke, and with his arms around her, and with her love of him willing now —

It was thus, if it need be said, that Mr. Biggamore had seen them.

But what now? Shall FINIS be written with a curlycue beneath it, and so have done? Or shall the stray threads be gathered up, and the woof be woven into the fuller piece? Enough is as good as a feast, and it is the wise story-teller who knows when and where to stop. But a word or two more now, and then you may clap on your own moral to adorn the finished tale.

Exit Mr. Stanton, in the first place. It was little Mr. Biggamore who dragged out of that now thoroughly frightened gentleman the admission that he had, indeed, married Miss Maria in the long ago. Mr. Biggamore gave him his alternative — to confess that he was lawfully married to her, or, if the marriage had been a cheat, to repair the cheat by making her now his legal wife. If Mr. Stanton refused, he had the choice of going to jail; and to back up his threat, Mr. Biggamore wagged the bundle of papers in his face. So Mr. Stanton confessed. He had been lawfully married in the beginning; and Mr. Biggamore, worming out of him the alderman's name, and then assuring himself that the alderman had really married the two, gave the

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agitated Stanwood Geikie twenty-four hours in which to get out of New York. Is it necessary to say that he accepted the terms?

But about Mrs. Pinchin. No — let us say little of the day when Mrs. Pinchin, brought down from her room above, departed from the scene of her glories and of her downfall. She hobbled down the steps on Miss Maria's arm; and a dingy cab drove off with them, Mrs. Pinchin leaning back in grim silence, and Miss Maria, for the last time, turning on the waterworks. Yet let us draw a veil over that; and let us tell only briefly how Corrie offered a home to Miss Maria, which Miss Maria refused. "No, my place is with Judie. I can't stay here with you. I've got to take care of my sister; she needs me more than ever now. Of course, if you could take her in, too — — —"

So the two departed. The big house in West Seventy-fifth Street was closed; and Corrie went away to her happiness — a happiness that seemed to be worth all the pain it had cost to bring it to her. And then, one day, a year later, Corrie returned home at nightfall.

"Hello, dearest — oh, just a moment," said Phil, laughing; "I've gone and knocked ashes all over my drawing. Now — dare me again, will you?"

But Corrie had turned away to stare solemnly at the floor. "Phil," she said, after a long pause, "I took Virgie out driving with me to-day."

"Yes, sweetheart — and then what?"

THE TABLEAU IN THE DRAWING-ROOM

"A strap broke on the harness, and we got out and walked."

"Did you? And where did you walk, Corrie?"

"We took a street car when we were tired walking; and, Phil ——"

Phil put down his pipe, and quietly laid a hand on hers. "What is it, Corrie?"

"Phil, I saw Mrs. Pinchin!"

And so she had; though in the crowded car Mrs. Pinchin and Miss Maria, too, had not seen her.

They had got on with the crowd at Fourteenth Street, Mrs. Pinchin scowling and grumbling fretfully at Miss Maria, who was trying to help her aboard.

"Miss Maria had her arms full of bundles," said Corrie. "It looked as if they had been out buying their dinner."

But when Mrs. Pinchin had lumbered aboard, the crowd of shoppers had filled the car, and there were no seats left. So Mrs. Pinchin had transferred her scowl from Miss Maria to a man sitting near her; and the man burying his face in his newspaper, and affecting not to see that she wished his seat, Mrs. Pinchin had crooked her cane through a strap and clung on, Miss Maria hanging to another strap, and holding out her elbow to support her sister.

"And then, Phil, Miss Maria dropped one of her bundles. It broke open, and there were a few tomatoes in it and one orange. They rolled around

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under the people's feet, and when the passengers stooped over to help Miss Maria pick them up, I could see Mrs. Pinchin muttering at her. Phil, she was just as shabby and threadbare as — why — well, an old apple woman. So was Miss Maria, too, of course; but Mrs. Pinchin's cloak and skirt were faded almost green, and when the car lurched and she put out a hand to support herself, I could see her waist. It was an old plum-colored brocade she'd made me make over for her, long ago, and now it was all worn and mended so much I hardly knew it.

“But after they'd picked up the things from the floor, a man got up, and Mrs. Pinchin shoved herself into the vacant seat. She didn't offer to take poor Miss Maria's packages, but sat there with her two hands leaning on her stick, and her jaw set and frowning straight ahead of her. Finally, I could n't stand it any longer, so I told Virgie I had to get out.”

“Humh!” said Phil, reflectively.

Corrie dropped her chin into her hand, and stared again across Phil's drawing-table.

“Phil, I feel as if I could n't stand it any longer, when I think of her.”

“Who? Mrs. Pinchin?”

“No, Phil. I mean Miss Maria. Don't you think I should give them the same allowance my father made them? Miss Maria tried as much as she could to be kind.”

Phil's hand stole out and laid itself on Corrie's.

THE TABLEAU IN THE DRAWING-ROOM

“ Dear, you must n’t ask me. It’s your money, and you must do with it as you think best. But, Corrie — *oh!* ”

Holding her to him, he looked down into her tearful eyes.

“ Dear little tender-hearted girl! ” he whispered.



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